

Response to “Report on the Proposal to Close Pleck Library”

A document has been received from the “Friends of Pleck Library”, a group of residents from the Pleck area who are opposed to the proposal to close Pleck Library as part of the Council’s revenue budget savings for 2016/17. The document, entitled “Report on the Proposal to Close Pleck Library”, contains two alternative options to make the required level of savings for 2016/17:

- a) Closing libraries for one hour at lunch thereby saving 5 hours per week (1976 hours per year), reducing the Central Library’s opening hours from 49 hours per week to 43 hours and halving the mobile library’s costs. This assumes to make a saving of £291,155 per year.
- b) Closing the libraries that are currently open 5 days per week, for one additional day to 4 days per week, as well as reducing the Central Library’s opening hours from 49 hours per week to 43 hours and halving the mobile library’s costs. This assumes to make a saving of £477,338 per year.

It is acknowledged that the Friends Group have put a considerable amount of work into their proposals; their commitment and dedication is to be applauded.

Summary response

Proposal (a)

Proposal (a) **would not** achieve a saving of £291,155 per year, for the following reasons.

1. Any saving would be a year one saving only. The group’s assertion that their suggestions would save £291,155 in year one cannot be represented as a further two year saving of £582,310. The initial sum would be removed from the revenue budget in year one and cannot be saved again in year two.
2. As the budget proposal commented on by the group included the cessation of the mobile library service, running one of the mobile vehicles would not make a saving; it would do the opposite.
3. A reduction in library opening hours does not equate to a like for like reduction in the overall costs of operating a library service. The building costs would not alter and there would be very little saving in staff costs as, in the libraries referred to, staff would simply have their lunch at the same time instead of staggering their lunch breaks.

It should also be noted that:

- This proposal would negatively impact upon the 2017/18 proposal to implement Open+ technology in retained libraries to support opening hours and enable the more efficient deployment of staff, with a saving of £349,813.
- This proposal would negatively impact on significantly more library users than the original budget proposal.

Proposal (b)

Proposal (b) **would not** achieve a saving of £477,338 per year, for the following reasons.

1. Any saving would be a year 1 saving only. As referred to above, it would not be a year on year saving.
2. As the budget proposal commented on by the group included the cessation of the mobile library service, halving the mobile service would not make a saving; it would do the opposite.
3. A reduction in the number of days libraries are open does not equate to a like for like reduction in the overall costs of operating a library service. The building costs would not alter. The staffing costs would be reduced, but the reduction would not total £477,338. The maximum saving in staff costs, allowing for a minimum complement of staff at the libraries, would be in the region of £107,472.

It should also be noted that:

- This proposal would negatively impact upon the 2017/18 proposal to implement Open+ technology in retained libraries to support opening hours and enable the more efficient deployment of staff, with a saving of £349,813.
- This proposal would negatively impact on significantly more library users than the original budget proposal.

Background

The Library Service has reduced its opening hours on several occasions in recent years as a way of reducing costs to meet budget targets. The last major reduction in opening hours was in April 2009, when all libraries were closed on Mondays as part of revenue savings.

Prior to this, libraries were grouped by levels of use and this was reflected in the total number of hours they opened. Therefore, the less busy libraries opened the least number of hours and the busiest libraries opened the most. This ensured that resources were effectively deployed to meet demand and in the places where they of benefit to the most people.

Pleck Library is part of the Central and Walsall South Area, which also operates Walsall Central, Darlaston, Pheasey, Pleck and South Walsall libraries. The Area team of staff currently provide an appropriate number of staff, at an appropriate level of experience and qualification, to cover each library and maintain advertised opening hours.

Library opening hours range from 49.5 per week at Walsall Central Library to 21 at Beechdale and 22 at Pleck, Rushall, South Walsall and Walsall Wood libraries. While there are no specific standards, this reflected the minimum levels of opening that could be considered viable for a small branch library. It should be noted that staffing levels and costs also broadly reflect this. While there have been a few minor tweaks to hours at some branches, this broad concept remains in place.

Staffing restructures since 2011 have further reduced management, professional and supervisory staff to achieve saving targets. Every effort has been made to protect the customer facing service. The level of expenditure on stock has also been reduced, despite the service still endeavouring to meet the needs of the whole population of Walsall.

However, the level of saving required for 2016 cannot be achieved simply by further reductions in opening hours.

Current library usage

It is of note that 75.6% of library visits in the borough of Walsall are made to the seven largest libraries, which would be retained in the current proposals, namely:

| | |
|-----------------|-------|
| Walsall Central | 31.9% |
| Bloxwich | 8.2% |
| Darlaston | 8.0% |
| Brownhills | 7.3% |
| Pelsall | 7.1% |
| Aldridge | 6.7% |
| Willenhall | 6.4% |

The staffing costs for the same seven libraries represent just 66.2% of library staffing expenditure.

It therefore follows that 33.8% of current staff costs are directed towards the libraries that deliver only 24.4% of visits. Without making judgement on the relative levels of need of these users, this appears to offer less efficient use of resources and to benefit fewer people.

It should be noted that part of the cost associated with the larger libraries is that the cost of Area Librarians, who actually support the smaller libraries too, is charged to the larger libraries.

Alternative solution (a): Closing libraries for one hour at lunch thereby saving 5 hours per week (1976 hours per year), reducing the Central Library's opening hours from 49 hours per week to 43 hours and halving the mobile library's costs. This assumes to make a saving of £291,155 per year.

| Library | Current hours open | Average visits per hour | Average visits per year |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Walsall Central | 49.5 | 133.2 | 34,632 |
| Aldridge | 43 | 32 | 8,320 |
| Bloxwich | 43 | 39.2 | 10,192 |
| Brownhills | 43 | 35.2 | 9,152 |
| Darlaston | 43 | 38.3 | 9,958 |
| Pelsall | 43 | 33.9 | 8,814 |
| Willenhall | 43 | 30.5 | 7,930 |

This suggestion to reduce the opening hours of the larger libraries would clearly disadvantage far more people who use those libraries i.e. 75.6% of library users.

The totals are, on average, 342.3 visitors per hour who would be disadvantaged, in contrast to 29.4, for example, at Pleck. On an annual basis this represents disadvantaging 88,920 visitors compared to 33,729, the ratio is approx 3:1.

In practise, this is likely to be an underestimation, as the level of use at many larger libraries rises over the lunchtime period. At Walsall Central Library, the estimated rise at lunch time is 15%, from 133.2 visits per hour to 157 visits per hour. This clearly indicates that this would not be a reasonable time to close and further confirms that this option offers a significant reduction in service to users of the library service as a whole.

The Mobile Library service provides access to library services in areas without easy access to a local branch library. Mobile 1 is the urban mobile which makes 46 stops around the Borough every week; Mobile 2 visits sheltered housing, day centres and residential homes and many users of this service are frail and elderly. There is currently a budget proposal to cease both of these mobile services as part of the budget options for 2016/17. The Housebound Library Service would be retained.

The possibility of reducing the mobile library provision to one vehicle has the potential to make some level of saving (approx £80,000), but this would not necessarily translate into halving the full cost of the service as is assumed in the

Friends' option. While consideration could be given to reducing the frequency of visits, the Mobile 2 rota (to sheltered accommodation and residential homes) is already monthly, which is considered to be the minimum frequency to make this service viable.

The two vehicles are not completely interchangeable as they serve different communities with different needs, although they do endeavour to "cover" for each other at times of need. At the most simplistic level halving the mobile libraries would halve the number of customers served hence a further 12,597 visitors would be disadvantaged.

Alternative solution (b); Closing the libraries that are currently open 5 days per week, for one additional day to 4 days per week, as well as reducing the Central Library's opening hours from 49 hours per week to 43 hours and halving the mobile library's costs. This assumes to make a saving of £477,338 per year.

All libraries are currently closed on Sunday and Monday (with the exception of the Central Library which opens between 13.00 and 16.00 on Sunday). The closure on Monday was introduced in 2009 as a budget saving measure and is still unpopular with library users. Regular requests are received to re-instate this day on the CIPFA PLUS customer satisfaction survey. Mid week closing has always been unpopular at larger libraries and every effort has been made to maintain access to the larger libraries for as long as possible. Mid week closing would not be cost effective in the light of the visitor figures below.

On average, an additional day's closure would disadvantage the number of visitors listed below per year (based on annual visits 2014/15).

| | |
|-----------------|--------|
| Walsall Central | 65,800 |
| Bloxwich | 18,346 |
| Darlaston | 17,924 |
| Brownhills | 16,474 |
| Pelsall | 15,865 |
| Aldridge | 14,976 |
| Willenhall | 14,274 |
| Pheasey | 6,531 |

This totals 104,391 visitors per year who would potentially be disadvantaged by closing larger libraries for an additional day. This would result in a fall of the number of visits to libraries in the Borough and increase the average cost per visit. As stated previously Pleck's average visitor figure per year is 33,729 - the ratio in this case is again 3:1.

When combined with the other part of suggestion 2, a total of 116,988 visitors would be disadvantaged a ratio of 3.5:1 compared with current Pleck users.

Consultation has highlighted that the mobile service is used by some of the more frail and vulnerable members of the community and, having listened to this feedback, the Council is minded to consider this part of the Group's proposal and keep one of the two mobile vehicles to ensure that people who are unable to use one of the remaining static library service points are able to access the Library Service.

Conclusion

The service reductions that included the proposal to close Pleck Library were designed to have a negative impact on the least number of library users across the Borough and maintain a library network that is as reasonably accessible as possible. Every household in the Borough would be within two miles of a library.

It is acknowledged that the Friends Group have done a considerable amount of work around their proposals and their commitment and dedication is to be congratulated. However, their proposals protect residents in the small geographical area around the smallest libraries and, as shown above, would negatively affect a greater number of residents at the ratio of 3.1. If applied to all the small libraries identified in the proposals for closure, where visitor figures may be less than half those of Pleck, the ratio of disaffection for customer of the larger libraries rises 6.1.

In the context of the levels of saving required (£487,912) the proposal to close 7 of the smallest and least used libraries, including Pleck Library, remains reasonable in terms of accessibility to the service for the majority of library users and maintains a library within two miles of every household.

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 requires the local authority to provide a library service that is both comprehensive and efficient and freely accessible to anyone who wishes to make use of it, but it has been recognised that a statutory service can no longer be realistically provided on "every street corner" as can be seen below in the judgement of the Judicial Review on the library closure proposals of Lincolnshire Council in 2014.

Judgement of Lincolnshire Judicial Review July 2014

Extracts from judgement:

1) *in Bailey v London Borough of Brent [2011] EWHC 2572 (Admin):-*
"A comprehensive service cannot mean that every resident lives close to a library. This has never been the case. Comprehensive has therefore been taken to

*mean **delivering a service that is accessible to all residents using reasonable means, including digital technologies. An efficient service must make the best use of the assets available in order to meet its core objectives and vision, recognising the constraints on council resources.** Decisions about the Service must be embedded within a clear strategic framework which draws upon evidence about needs and aspirations across the diverse communities of the borough."*

*2) The key is a reasonable ability to access the service by all residents of the county (Lincolnshire). **This means that distances and time taken to reach a library must be reasonable and any particular problems, whether physical disabilities, or created by age or family considerations, must be capable of being met.** Furthermore, budgetary constraints can properly be taken into account in deciding the nature of the service provided that it meets the requirements of s.7 of the 1964 Act.*

*3) Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires a public authority in exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not.....The obligation created by s.149 is to devise a mechanism to avoid unlawful discrimination. **Provided that proper consideration is had to this and what is proposed cannot be said to be irrational in terms of avoidance of unlawful discrimination, there is compliance.***

REPORT ON THE PROPOSAL TO CLOSE PLECK LIBRARY

BY FRIENDS OF PLECK LIBRARY

4TH JANUARY 2016

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report has been prepared for the councillors of Walsall in response to the proposal to close Pleck library, 6 other libraries and the mobile library service.

We, the Friends of Pleck library believe that this proposal to close the libraries should be rejected and have findings which we will present in our report to highlight the reasons why.

In preparing this report we have used the findings from the 2011 Census, a report called Literacy Changes Lives 2014: A new perspective on health, employment and crime by Joe Morrisroe from the National Literacy Trust, the lovelibrarieswalsall.co.uk website and maps and Library performance and costs 2014-15 report provided by Sue Grainger.

SUMMARY

The findings of this report show that closing Pleck Library would be detrimental to the residents of Pleck ward.

- Pleck is the cheapest library to run at £38,179, making up less than 2% of the budget for libraries and at £1.13 per person, also represents value for money. If the library was promoted correctly, this figure has the potential to come down as the footfall increases.
- There are many aspects of a person's life affected by the closure of Pleck library. Job prospects are directly affected by the level of reading in a person's youth. By taking away the library, you are reducing the chances of having a better job. With 39.4% of people economically inactive and more than 50% with little or no qualifications, it is hard to see how these figures can be improved if library facilities which are beneficial to the community as a whole are taken away.
- By closing the libraries which are open full time for lunch, ie 5 hours a week, and halving the mobile library service, a **potential saving of £291,195 per annum** can be made. This will enable the service to remain for all areas of the community but still make the savings that are required over the next 2 years.
- Volunteering is not the solution – as the low levels of education, the lack of transport and the social deprivation in the area show that it is not feasible and not a practical solution for the long term benefit of Pleck.

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- f. Other - Accessibility of the proposed library structure

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- a. Closure for lunch
- b. Closure for a day

SECTION 1 – ANALYSIS OF LIBRARIES

1. Cost to Run

The table below highlights the costs to run a particular library and the cost as a percentage of the total cost to run all of the libraries. (All data has been taken from Library performance and costs 2014-15 report provided by Sue Grainger – See Appendix 1).

| | Cost to Run (£) | Cost % of Total | Rank |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------|
| Pleck | 38,179 | 1.87% | 1 |
| South Walsall | 38,179 | 1.87% | 1 |
| Beechdale | 40,363 | 1.98% | 3 |
| Rushall | 42,953 | 2.11% | 4 |
| Walsall Wood | 42,953 | 2.11% | 4 |
| New Invention | 56,172 | 2.75% | 6 |
| Blakenall | 56,172 | 2.75% | 6 |
| Streety | 57,306 | 2.81% | 8 |
| Pheasey | 67,963 | 3.33% | 9 |
| Pelsall | 81,530 | 4.00% | 10 |
| Bloxwich | 161,588 | 7.92% | 11 |
| Willenhall | 161,588 | 7.92% | 11 |
| Brownhills | 164,092 | 8.04% | 13 |
| Aldridge | 164,092 | 8.04% | 13 |
| Darlaston | 190,943 | 9.36% | 15 |
| Mobile Library | 257,494 | 12.62% | 16 |
| Central | 418,733 | 20.52% | 17 |
| | | | |
| | 2,040,300 | | |

Pleck library is the cheapest to run at £38,179 which is less than 2% of the total cost to run the libraries.

All of the libraries which are being shut are the cheapest to run. It costs £314,971 to run the 7 libraries which are up for closure. This makes up only 15.44% of the total amount which is being spent on libraries.

2. Cost per Person

This has been calculated by using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Cost to Run}}{\text{Footfall}}$$

The table below shows the ranking of the libraries in terms of how much it costs per person.

| | Footfall | Cost to Run (£) | Cost per person (£) | Rank |
|----------------|-----------|-----------------|---------------------|------|
| Pelsall | 75,955 | 81,530 | 1.07 | 1 |
| Streetly | 50,712 | 57,306 | 1.13 | 2 |
| Pleck | 33,729 | 38,179 | 1.13 | 2 |
| Central | 343,111 | 418,733 | 1.22 | 4 |
| Beechdale | 22,902 | 40,363 | 1.76 | 5 |
| Bloxwich | 87,726 | 161,588 | 1.84 | 6 |
| New Invention | 28,422 | 56,172 | 1.98 | 7 |
| Brownhills | 78,800 | 164,092 | 2.08 | 8 |
| Blakenall | 25,711 | 56,172 | 2.18 | 9 |
| Pheasey | 31,086 | 67,963 | 2.19 | 10 |
| Darlaston | 85,825 | 190,943 | 2.22 | 11 |
| Aldridge | 71,768 | 164,092 | 2.29 | 12 |
| Willenhall | 68,331 | 161,588 | 2.36 | 13 |
| Rushall | 16,381 | 42,953 | 2.62 | 14 |
| South Walsall | 14,480 | 38,179 | 2.64 | 15 |
| Walsall Wood | 15,328 | 42,953 | 2.80 | 16 |
| Mobile Library | 25,195 | 257,494 | 10.22 | 17 |
| | | | | |
| | 1,075,462 | 2,040,300 | 1.90 | |

This is an important calculation because it shows the cost to run a particular library compared to the number of people that use that library.

The cost per person ranges from £1.07 per person to a maximum of £10.22, with an average of £1.90 per person. This shows that 10 of the 16 libraries are running at less than the average cost per person and therefore less than maximum efficiency.

Pleck library is joint second at £1.13. This shows that as well as being the cheapest to run, Pleck library is a very efficient library to run and maintains value for money. It does call into question why all the libraries are not running equally as well and why this has not been investigated earlier.

More work clearly needs to be done for the other 10 libraries to ensure that not only is there efficiency in terms of staffing but also that the maximum numbers of people are brought into the library. This will then minimise the cost per person.

3. Books taken out per Person

This has been calculated by using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Books Issued}}{\text{Footfall}}$$

The table below shows the ranking of the libraries in terms of how many books are taken out per person.

| | Footfall | Books Issued | Books per Person | Rank |
|----------------|-----------|--------------|------------------|------|
| Mobile Library | 25,195 | 89,139 | 3.54 | 1 |
| South Walsall | 14,480 | 26,817 | 1.85 | 2 |
| Walsall Wood | 15,328 | 21,155 | 1.38 | 3 |
| Pheasey | 31,086 | 34,528 | 1.11 | 4 |
| Streetly | 50,712 | 52,808 | 1.04 | 5 |
| Aldridge | 71,768 | 72,117 | 1.00 | 6 |
| Bloxwich | 87,726 | 71,872 | 0.82 | 7 |
| Willenhall | 68,331 | 54,161 | 0.79 | 8 |
| New Invention | 28,422 | 21,060 | 0.74 | 9 |
| Pleck | 33,729 | 23,537 | 0.70 | 10 |
| Pelsall | 75,955 | 52,874 | 0.70 | 11 |
| Beechdale | 22,902 | 14,716 | 0.64 | 12 |
| Brownhills | 78,800 | 49,790 | 0.63 | 13 |
| Rushall | 16,381 | 10,040 | 0.61 | 14 |
| Darlaston | 85,825 | 49,963 | 0.58 | 15 |
| Blakenall | 25,711 | 14,790 | 0.58 | 16 |
| Central | 343,111 | 193,520 | 0.56 | 17 |
| | | | | |
| | 1,050,267 | 763,748 | | |

Pleck is ranked 10th in terms of books taken out per person. However, it must also be noted that the main Central library has the worst average for books taken out per person and therefore if this was the sole basis upon which a library closure should be based, Central library should be closed first.

SECTION 2 – EFFECT ON THE PUBLIC

The Council has 5 main priorities which will be looked at in turn.

1. Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work

“Low literacy levels could be a defining factor holding back the recovery of the UK economy following the financial crisis and could pose a threat to future economic sustainability. Poor literacy is contributing to skill shortages and employer dissatisfaction, and may be a factor in the UK productivity gap. Furthermore, an increase in basic skills could reduce the number of low-paid jobs in the UK.”

Literacy Changes Lives 2014: A new perspective on health, employment and crime. Joe Morrisroe, National Literacy Trust

| | Number of people (Pleck) | Pleck % | Walsall % | E&W % |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|-----------|-------|
| Economically Inactive | 4011 | 39.4% | 33.9% | 30.3% |

(The data above shows Census 2011 – See Appendix 2) The above table shows that 39.4% of Pleck residents are economically inactive, compared to 33.9% in the rest of Walsall and 30.3% in England and Wales.

This can be linked directly back to the levels of education as is 37.1% of residents with no qualifications compared to the rest of Walsall at 33.7% and 22.7% in the rest of England and Wales.

| | Number of people (Pleck) | Pleck % | Walsall % | E&W % |
|--|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| No qualifications | 4087 | 37.1% | 33.7% | 22.7% |
| Level 1 - 1-4 GCSEs or equivalent | 1637 | 14.8% | 14.6% | 13.3% |
| | | | | |
| Total | 5724 | 51.9% | 48.3% | 36.0% |

More than half of Pleck have no or Level 1 qualifications which then will directly impact on job prospects. If you cannot read properly, this will affect all round learning. This directly impacts upon job prospects.

“The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn the more places you’ll go.”

Dr. Seuss

The quote by Dr Seuss is apt because it is likely that people who do end up having a good job will move away from the area because they do not wish to stay in an area with high levels of deprivation. We need to keep facilities and amenities and clean up Walsall as a whole, so this gives people a reason to stay.

People are trying to stand on their own two feet and so they go to the library to use the computers to look for work as they cannot afford a computer at home.

Soon, with the advent of Universal Credit online application system, residents in Pleck will be furthermore disadvantaged as a result of the lack of computers should the library close down.

If these services are taken away, this will force them into more hardship as they will need to travel to look for work when income is limited. This will make it even harder for those disadvantaged people to stand and become independent.

Therefore, by taking away the library, a source of learning and education from the local people, you are directly impacting on the future of the local people. As a result, Walsall Council will be failing it's first priority (from your Corporate plan, vision and values) to support business to thrive and support people into work.

2. The Council aims to Improve Health and wellbeing, including independence for older people and the protection of vulnerable people.

“Individuals with poor literacy are less able to obtain, process and understand information about healthy living and self-regulate existing medical conditions. Studies show that those with inadequate literacy are up to 18 times less likely to be able to identify their medications compared to those with adequate literacy. They are also less likely to demonstrate how to take their prescription correctly. “

Literacy Changes Lives 2014: A new perspective on health, employment and crime. Joe Morrisroe, National Literacy Trust

The library is a service which benefits the old and vulnerable members of society and therefore by cutting these people off from the library service will mean they feel even more isolated from the rest of the community.

There are many people, especially the elderly and people who live alone who benefit from meeting others at the library. The opportunity for conversation and companionship eases their anxiety and it gives them something I look forward to. This in turn, improves their health and wellbeing as it stimulates their mind and body.

The Council will fail its second priority to Improve Health and wellbeing, including independence for older people and the protection of vulnerable people if Pleck library is shut down.

3. Creating Safe, Sustainable and Inclusive Communities

Pleck library has 8843 residents from the ethnic minority which is 58.9% of the ward population.

| | Number of people (Pleck) | Pleck % | Walsall % | E&W % |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---------|-----------|--------|
| Ethnic Minority | 8843 | 58.90% | 23.00% | 19.50% |

The fact that Pleck has a higher percentage of Ethnic minority residents compared to the 23% in Walsall and 19.5% in England and Wales indicates that there is a significant difference in the needs of this population compared to the needs of other ward areas. Pleck library fulfils the needs of the ethnic minority in a way that is not obvious just by looking at the raw numbers of cost and footfall.

All members of society want to feel that they belong to something bigger than themselves and their own communities. The libraries give them opportunities not only to educate themselves; but also to socialise with members of their community in a safe and welcoming environment.

Immigration and integration within society always provides a heated debate. There is a divide between people who think that people from ethnic minorities create a richer society, both culturally and financially and those people who feel that ethnic minorities create a drain on public funds. The one place in Pleck where people can meet without fear of reprisals is being taken away.

Pleck library is a place where people are exposed to other races and religions and because of this exposure; this imbues a feeling of understanding of others. This in turn leads to tolerance and acceptance of others in the community, leading to a safer, sustainable, inclusive community.

Aside from Pleck library, there is no other place that people of all races and religions can go and mix with each other. The consultation has shown the wide variety of people who attend the library and that this is a safe environment to maintain a sense of community. Pleck library enables people to make good friends with other members of the community who they otherwise wouldn't talk to. They also get the help from the library which they cannot obtain elsewhere.

Walsall council will therefore fail on priority number 3 to create a safer, sustainable and inclusive community if they close Pleck library.

4. Improving Safeguarding, Learning and the Life Chances for Children and Young People, raising aspirations

“Longitudinal research shows that people with good literacy skills are more likely to have higher self esteem, better health, better jobs and higher wages than those with poor literacy skills. They are more able to take advantage of the opportunities that life may offer them.”

Literacy Changes Lives 2014: A new perspective on health, employment and crime. Joe Morrisroe, National Literacy Trust

| | Number of people (Pleck) | Pleck % | Walsall % | E&W % |
|-----------------|---|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Children | 4002 | 26.7% | 20.9% | 18.9% |

Below is a letter from a child, stating the problems they would face as a result of Pleck library closing.

Tuesday 15th December 15

Walsall Council
The civic centre
Walsall
WS1 1TP

Dear Walsall Council,

I am very distressed that you have decided to close Peck library. It is an outrage that you have not considered how this will affect the children in the Peck area. I strongly believe that the library should remain open and hear are my reasons why.

Firstly, I do not have any internet at home so it is a fundamental need for me to go to Peck library and use the internet there.

In addition to that, I don't get much help with my homework at home and there are people in the library who will help me.

Moreover, because I don't have any internet I can't get any access to Education City, Bug Club, RM easy maths and maths logic playground.

To conclude, if Peck library does close we will have to go to the central library in town, which means we will have to pay for bus fare which we can't afford every day.

I hope that you will reconsider and keep the library open. I'll look forward to hearing your decision soon.

Your Sincerely

PUPIL FROM HILLARY PRIMARY SCHOOL

NAME DATA PROTECTED

There are a large number of letters from the children of Pleck stating how upset they are that Pleck library may close. The letters show that the closure of Pleck library would be detrimental to many children as not all children have computers or internet access at home and with the increase in the use of technology by schools, this problem will only increase. Homework is increasingly being set via computer programs and therefore these children will struggle to do the homework that is set by the school.

There are schools where there are children who do not have any English speakers within the family and therefore they go to the library to get help from the librarian where they would not get this help at home.

Children need libraries to support their literacy and reading development. The library provides a safe and quiet environment where the children can study, with staff that can provide support.

Should Pleck library close and children need to access to a library, they will require the presence of an adult in order to travel to another library. This may not always be possible and with the high costs of public transport, many parents will be unwilling to take the children to Darlaston or Central library on a regular basis.

The children are the future and by not providing them with a local library, you are severely reducing their chances of bettering themselves and thus bettering Walsall and society as a whole. The children will also start to feel that reading is not important as there will be no local focus which will promote reading.

In this way, Walsall Council will fail in priority 4 to Improve Safeguarding, Learning and the Life Chances for Children and Young People, raising aspirations, should Pleck library close.

5. Create a modern, dynamic and efficient workforce designed around what Residents need.

Suggestions have been made during the consultation process that volunteering may be the best solution to save the library service. The council gets a free workforce and the residents get the service they require. This goes against the above objective of the council because *they* will get the workforce *they* want and not what the residents need.

Volunteers can assist but cannot run libraries. No thought by the council has been made with regards to qualifications of staff, sustainability and the *residents need*. The residents of Plecklive in enough deprivation; they do not have the skills or resources to run a self-sufficient library service to the same standard at which it is run now.

Over the last 5 years, Walsall Council has advertised for over 22 library staff positions. The recruitment is extensive. Firstly, there is an application form, then long list in which there is a test. There is then a short list in which there is a group presentation. Finally, there is an interview, upon which a suitable candidate is appointed.

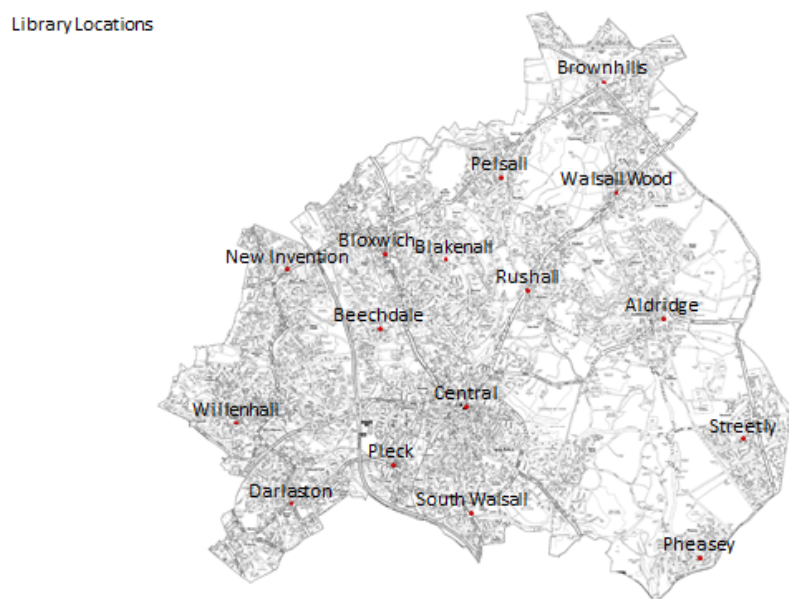
The recruitment process indicates the levels of competency required to run a library and the costs involved to recruit such an individual are high as a result. Therefore to discard the importance of the library staff and assume volunteers can deliver the same level of service is short sighted.

The Council will fail to create a modern, dynamic and efficient workforce designed around what Residents need by closing Pleck library.

Other factors affecting the public

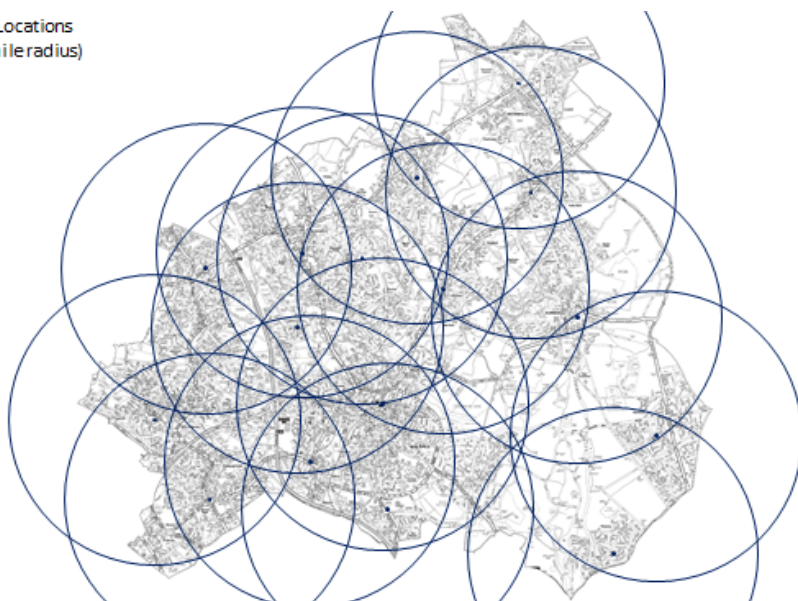
6. Accessibility of the proposed library structure

The map of library locations in Walsall is:



The current distribution of the library service is:

Library Locations
(with 2 mile radius)

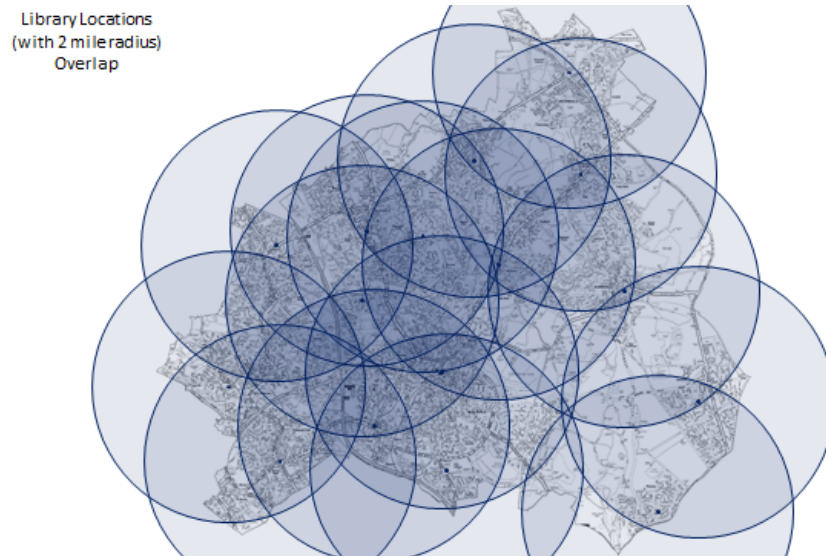


The proposal to keep open 9 libraries and close 7 along with the mobile library service means that the coverage is:

Proposed Library Locations
(with 2 mile radius)



The library model as it currently stands appears to have lots of overlap:



The proposed library model appears to show that the overlap is reduced and therefore there will be a saving in terms of efficiencies.



The idea that a 2 mile radius is the distance people are willing and able to travel is a ridiculous notion. It does not take into account many different factors.

In Pleck, there are 2164 households that do not have a car.

| | Number of people (Pleck) | Pleck % | Walsall % | E&W % |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Household with no car | 2164 | 40.20% | 28.80% | 25.60% |

This means that 40.2% of the Pleck ward will need the finances to use public transport to use a library. They will not be able to walk to a library when they needed it; they would likely need a bus. With the state of deprivation in Pleck, people will not prioritise going to the library with the little money that they have.

Typically those people who will struggle to get to a library will be the children who cannot drive and therefore will require an adult to take them into town. The elderly and vulnerable will be hit even further because a local service is something which is accessible to them albeit with difficulty but a service which is even further away will remain unused.

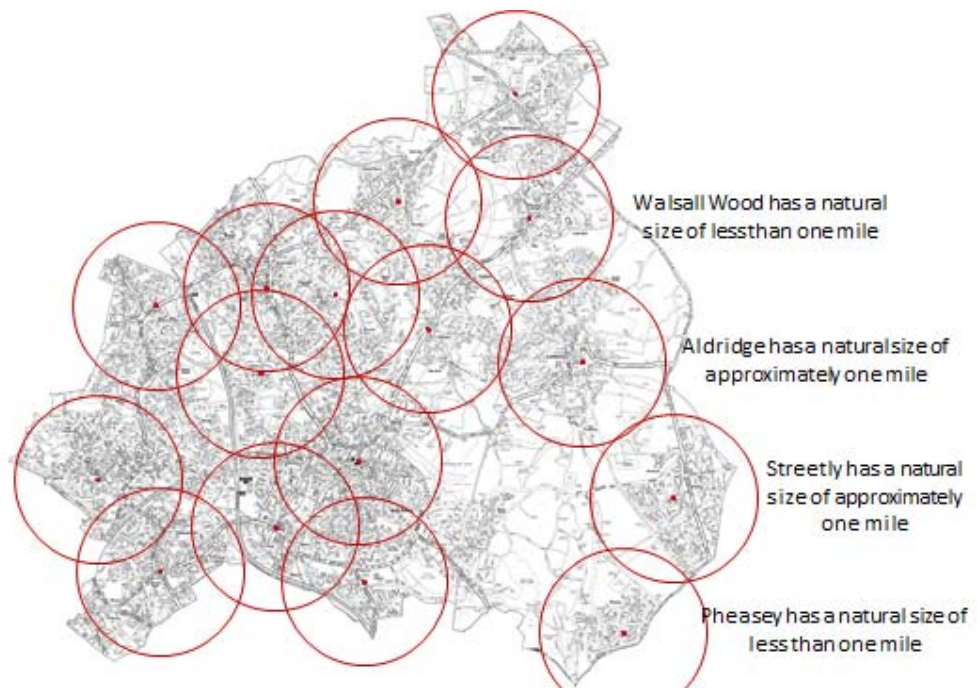
The closure of Pleck library will not automatically mean that the footfall will be redistributed to the Darlaston or Central libraries, simply because it does not take into account the numbers of households affected. Even those households with cars will not necessarily go to another library.

The redistribution of visitors to Pleck library also does not take into account the vulnerable people who will be affected by the proposed closure.

| | Number of people (Pleck) | Pleck % | Walsall % | E&W % |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Daily activities limited a lot | 1585 | 10.60% | 10.40% | 8.50% |
| General Health is bad/Very Bad | 1188 | 7.90% | 7.20% | 5.60% |

Within an area already suffering from poor health, lack of transport, few qualifications and therefore poorer jobs than the average in Walsall and England and Wales, it is detrimental to take away one of the few services that the area provides.

Therefore, on the basis that there are many people without cars and the children, elderly and vulnerable are most at risk from closure and therefore will struggle to travel, a mile radius is a lot closer to the truth regarding accessibility if we consider the following:



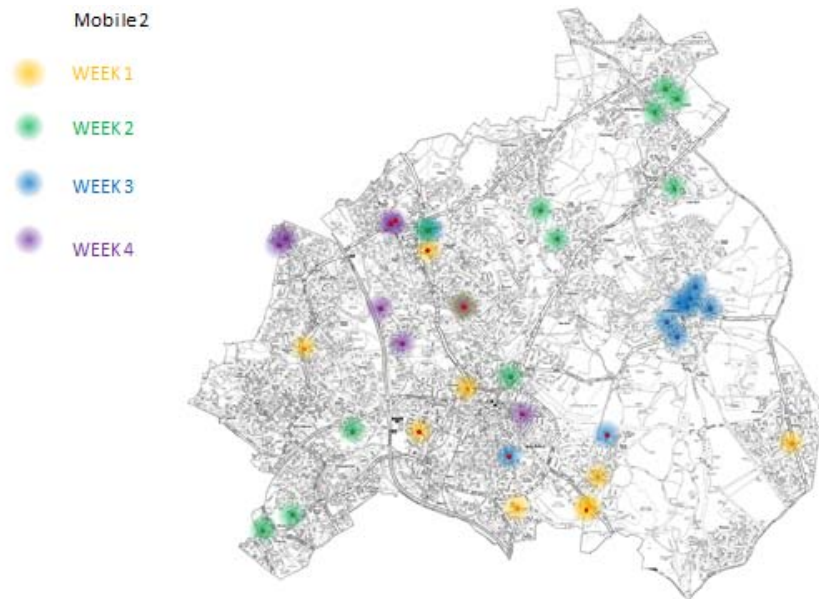
There are 2 mobile library vans which take books to the elderly and most vulnerable members of Walsall.

Mobile Van 1 goes to these places:

Mobile1

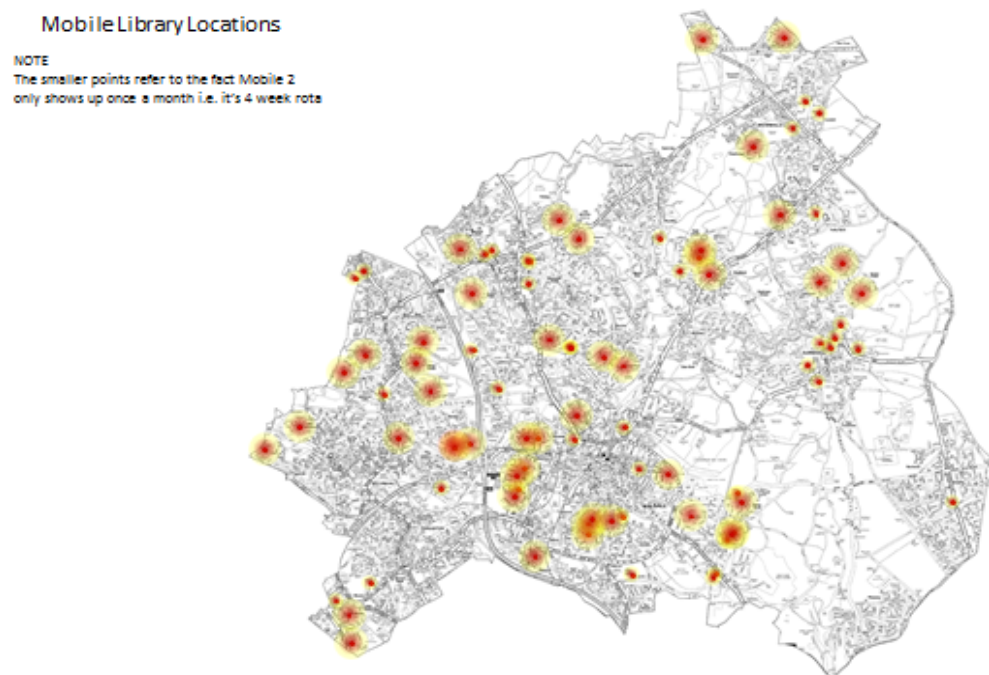


Mobile Van 2 goes to these places:



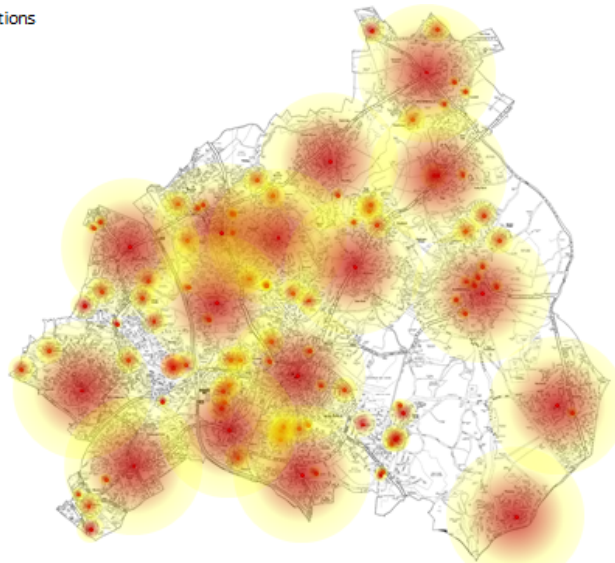
The data for mobile Van 2 shows that there is large area which is travelled within a week. It is possible for a better route to be drawn up between both the vans which will enable a significant cost saving to be made but also enable the service to continue so as not to stop the service affecting those most vulnerable.

The mobile library locations show the areas where people are most vulnerable.



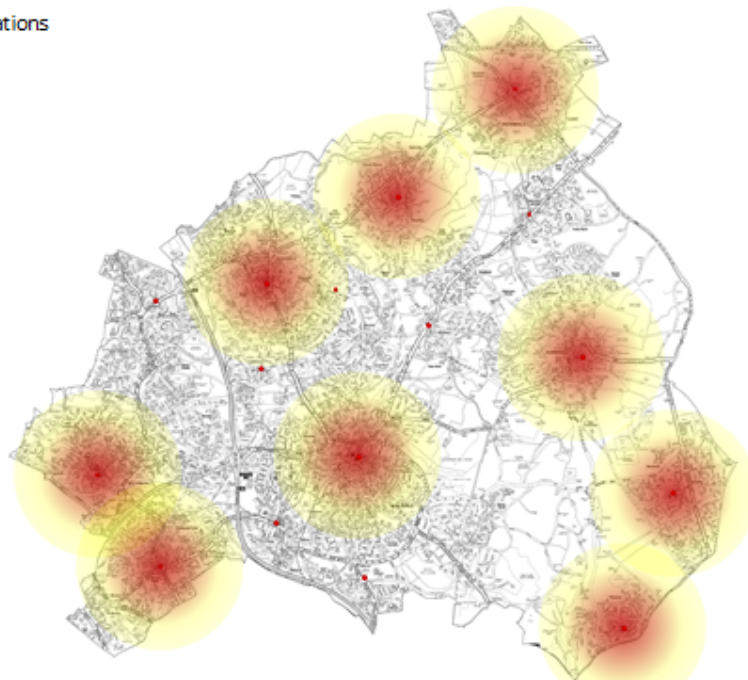
The following map shows the current library locations and the 1 mile radius which is affected by it. The smaller dots represent the mobile library locations.

Current Library Locations



The proposed library locations will cover a much more limited area of Walsall. It can be seen that the area near Pleck and surrounding areas is not represented well by the proposed library locations.

Proposed Library Locations



The proposal you have shown the public is fundamentally flawed because you have not taken into account the factors which are an everyday reality to the people of Walsall. People do not have access to cars, they do not have the time and money to travel to another library.

Note: See Appendix 3 which shows the complete workings for further details.

SECTION 3 - ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

1. Potential Savings – 5 hours a week

The table below shows the savings that can be made if the library's that are open full time (i.e. open 5 days a week (more than 2236 hours per annum)) are shut during lunch for an hour a day and therefore 5 hours a week. This will result in a reduction of hours to 1976 hours per annum.

A number of assumptions have been made:

- Central library will also be reduced to 2236 hours per annum (which is 43 hours a week).
- The mobile library will continue to run but at half the capacity that it is currently run. This will mean that there is a halving of the mobile library cost. This does not take into account any efficiencies which could be put in place.
- The remaining libraries keep the same amount of hours and therefore there are no savings made from them.

| | Cost to Run (£) | Hours Open (Annually) | Max hrs (1976) | Savings - reduce by 5 hours |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| Central | 418,733 | 2574 | 363,747.86 | 54,985.14 |
| Bloxwich | 161,588 | 2236 | 142,798.70 | 18,789.30 |
| Darlaston | 190,943 | 2236 | 168,740.33 | 22,202.67 |
| Brownhills | 164,092 | 2236 | 145,011.53 | 19,080.47 |
| Pelsall | 81,530 | 2236 | 72,049.77 | 9480.23 |
| Streetly | 57,306 | 1560 | 72,587.60 | |
| Aldridge | 164,092 | 2236 | 145,011.53 | 19,080.47 |
| Willenhall | 161,588 | 2236 | 142,798.70 | 18,789.30 |
| Pleck | 38,179 | 1144 | 65,945.55 | |
| Beechdale | 40,363 | 1092 | 73,037.81 | |
| New Invention | 56,172 | 1560 | 71,151.20 | |
| Blakenall | 56,172 | 1560 | 71,151.20 | |
| Pheasey | 67,963 | 1976 | 67,963.00 | |
| Rushall | 42,953 | 1144 | 74,191.55 | |
| Walsall Wood | 42,953 | 1144 | 74,191.55 | |
| South Walsall | 38,179 | 1144 | 65,945.55 | |
| Mobile Library | 257,494 | | | 128,747.00 |
| | | | | |
| | 2,040,300 | 28,314 | 1,816,323.41 | 291,154.58 |

Based upon the assumptions that have been made, there will be a £291,155 saving per annum if this is put in place, but all areas and services will still be provided. Therefore, over 2 years, the saving will be £582,310 which is £94,398 more than is expected by the council.

This is a feasible proposal because all libraries that are part time will remain open which is more favourable than closing the libraries altogether. This is because the vulnerable members of society will still have their service but the council will still make the savings that it requires.

2. Potential Savings – Close 1 day a week (ie reduce to 30 hours)

The table below shows the savings that can be made if the library's that are open full time (i.e. open 5 days a week (more than 2236 hours per annum)) are shut for one day a week, ie the service is reduced to 30 hours which is 1560 hours per annum.

A number of assumptions have been made:

- Central library will also be reduced to 2236 hours per annum (which is 43 hours a week).
- The mobile library will continue to run but at half the capacity that it is currently run. This will mean that there is a halving of the mobile library cost. This does not take into account any efficiencies which could be put in place.
- The remaining libraries keep the same amount of hours and therefore there are no savings made from them, as they are already equal or less than the 1560 hours.

| | Cost to Run (£) | Hours Open (Annually) | Max hrs (1560) | Savings - reduce to 4 days ie 30 hours |
|----------------|------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Central | 418,733 | 2574 | 363,747.86 | 54,985.14 |
| Bloxwich | 161,588 | 2236 | 112,735.81 | 48,852.19 |
| Darlaston | 190,943 | 2236 | 133,216.05 | 57,726.95 |
| Brownhills | 164,092 | 2236 | 114,482.79 | 49,609.21 |
| Pelsall | 81,530 | 2236 | 56,881.40 | 24,648.60 |
| Streetly | 57,306 | 1560 | 57,306.00 | 0.00 |
| Aldridge | 164,092 | 2236 | 114,482.79 | 49,609.21 |
| Willenhall | 161,588 | 2236 | 112,735.81 | 48,852.19 |
| Pleck | 38,179 | 1144 | 52,062.27 | |
| Beechdale | 40,363 | 1092 | 57,661.43 | |
| New Invention | 56,172 | 1560 | 56,172.00 | 0.00 |
| Blakenall | 56,172 | 1560 | 56,172.00 | 0.00 |
| Pheasey | 67,963 | 1976 | 53,655.00 | 14,308.00 |
| Rushall | 42,953 | 1144 | 58,572.27 | |
| Walsall Wood | 42,953 | 1144 | 58,572.27 | |
| South Walsall | 38,179 | 1144 | 52,062.27 | |
| Mobile Library | 257,494 | | | 128,747.00 |
| | | | | |
| | 2,040,300 | 28,314 | 1,510,518.03 | 477,338.49 |

As can be seen the table above, a saving of £477,338 could be made within one year should the other libraries which are not up for closure, be closed for one day. This would ensure that all libraries within the borough would still have a service to offer its local residents.

Proposal 1 is a better solution as it has minimal impact on the service, but will allow time to implement other changes and strategies within the library service as a whole.

Proposal 2 will allow a heavier saving, if this saving is needed sooner. This will still have a more desirable outcome than the proposed closure put forward by Walsall council because the all Walsall residents will be able to keep their library service.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted the adverse effects of the closure of Pleck library on the residents of Pleck. Similar effects will be felt by all wards facing library closures.

We have highlighted two possible options as a solution to the shortfall in your budget for your consideration. Please consider all other alternatives for the best solution for the residents of Pleck, Walsall to avoid adverse impact on everyone.

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 3