

CORPORATE AND PUBLIC SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 February 2017 at 6.00pm at the Council House, Walsall

Panel Members Present	Councillor A. Andrew (Chair) Councillor C. Creaney (Vice-Chair) Councillor D. Barker Councillor M. Bird Councillor S. Craddock Councillor M. Nazir Councillor L. Rattigan Councillor G. Sohal Councillor M. Ward Councillor R. Worrall
Portfolio Holder	Councillor S. Coughlan – Leader Councillor D. Coughlan – Social Care Councillor J. Fitzpatrick – Community, Leisure and Culture Councillor A. Nawaz – Personnel and Business Support Councillor I. Shires – Agenda for Change
Members in attendance	Councillor B. Allen Councillor J. Murray Councillor C. Towe Councillor T. Wilson
Officers Present	Simon Neilson – Executive Director (Economy and Environment) Julie Alderson - Executive Director (Change and Governance) Chris Holliday - Head of Leisure, Culture & Operations Steve Pretty - Head of Planning, Engineering and Transport Craig Goodall – Senior Democratic Services Officer
In attendance	Mr M. Blackmore Ms. G. Jameson

158/17 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A. Nazir.

159/17 Substitutions

There were no substitutions.

160/17 Declarations of Interest and Party Whip

There were no declarations of interest or party whip.

161/17 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

The Chair reported that there was an appendix to the interim report of the Remembrance Day Working Group that disclosed exempt information that would need to be considered in private session should the Committee wish to discuss it in detail.

Resolved:

That item 165/17 'Interim report of the Remembrance Day Working Group' be considered in private session as the report contains exempt information as defined under paragraph 3 (information relating to the financial or business affairs or any particular person (including the authority holding that information), of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)).

162/17 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved

That the minutes, as amended, of the meeting held on 3 January 2017 copies having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

163/17 Petition: Rushall, Pheasey and Bloxwich Libraries

The Committee heard three petitions, which had each received over 500 signatures, asking the Council to keep open Rushall, Pheasey and Bloxwich libraries.

The Chair outlined the format for the item and invited each petition organiser to introduce their petition.

Mike Blakemore introduced the petition to 'Save Rushall Library'. He explained that the library opened in 1961 and was the focal point of the local community. It was used by numerous community groups and provided activities for children during the summer. He asked for extra time to be able to set up a community library. Councillor Rattigan spoke in support of the petition and emphasised how the library was a focal point of the village. She was concerned that if the library closed it would attract anti-social behaviour. She queried how the equality implications of the proposed closure had been evaluated.

Councillor Towe introduced the petition to 'Save Pheasey Library'. He explained how in recent years volunteers had been used to increase the libraries opening hours which had led to an increase in visitor numbers. The

library was well used by community groups and provided computer access. He was concerned that there would be no library within 2 miles of Pheasey. He added that bus services to the next nearest libraries were poor. He was fearful that people, particularly older people, would become isolated. He noted the need to make budget savings but felt that there was a choice in how these savings could be made and that services the public valued should be protected. Glenys Jameson, Vice-Chair, Friends of Pheasey Library explained how she was concerned about the impact on residents. There were a lot of elderly people living in Pheasey who used the library. If it closed they may become socially isolated and require social care. There was little else to do in Pheasey so closure of the library would have an impact. Young people and job seekers used the facilities too. The Friends Group had been active and raised money to purchase new equipment.

Councillor Allen introduced the petition to 'Save Bloxwich Library'. He explained he was pleased to see that it was proposed to keep Bloxwich Library open. It was well used by the local community and also included a theatre.

The Portfolio Holder (Community, Leisure and Culture) responded to the petition. She reported that due to the council's budget challenges unfortunately it was not possible to maintain the existing library service. Cabinet had reviewed several models to ensure coverage of the borough. The proposed model meant the majority of residents would be within 2 miles of a library. There were some gaps in part of the Pheasey area which would be backfilled by the mobile library service. She confirmed that the proposals meant that Bloxwich Library would stay open.

The Committee debated the petitions at length with a particular focus on the impact of closing Pheasey Library. Some Members challenged how the impact of the closure of Pheasey Library was assessed? It was argued that the next nearest libraries, Central and Aldridge, involved difficult bus journeys and long walks for Pheasey residents who did not own cars or who were disabled. Following a question from a Member about alternative library facilities in other boroughs the Portfolio Holder highlighted that Kingstanding Library was accessible from Pheasey. A Member informed the Committee that Kingstanding Library was only open 21 hours a week and that he felt it was not appropriate to rely on other areas to provide services to Walsall residents. Due to the number of elderly people in the Pheasey area some Members had strong concerns that the closure of the library would lead people who currently lived active independent lives to become socially isolated and vulnerable. If this happened they may then need to access the Council's adult social care services at considerable cost.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the view of the elderly and disabled had been evaluated as part of the libraries consultation. A full Equalities Impact Assessment had been developed to inform the decision of Cabinet. Libraries would be located in the district centres which had transport links and supported planning policy. It was felt the proposals provided a comprehensive and efficient library service. If there was interest from the local community to

continue local book exchange services in the area then the Council would consider expressions of interest to work with local people.

Members questioned the process that would be undertaken to work with the local residents to establish local book exchanges. The Portfolio Holder outlined the steps that would be undertaken. The Chair noted that the final deadline for expressions of interest would be in August but libraries were scheduled to close on 30 June. He asked would libraries that had received expressions of interest stay open after 30 June or close? The Executive Director (Economy and Environment) explained that the viability of the business plans presented to the Council would affect what happened after 30 June. It would be up to Cabinet to choose the transition plans. Members felt that there was a risk libraries would close because of the tight timescales and it would be better for libraries to remain open whilst community groups completed their expressions of interest.

A Member raised the proposed closure of Pelsall Library and expressed concern that the Council would still have paid for the construction costs despite not having any services on site. He noted Pelsall had the highest footfall of all the district libraries and its co-location with a doctors surgery meant it was highly accessible to all local people.

A Member raised the issue of the Mobile Library Service and suggested it came at a high cost. He asked that more efficient methods of providing this service be investigated. The Leader agreed to investigate this issue.

With regard to Rushall Library a Member noted that it was listed as an asset of community value (ACV). The Member was disappointed that it had been selected for closure but emphasised the need for flair and imagination to create viable community run facilities.

The Leader outlined the need for the Council to make budget savings and the difficult decisions that the authority was facing. £31m of savings were required for 2017/18 and a four year budget plan was now in place. He committed to consider the views of the scrutiny committee.

The Chair concluded the item by suggesting that Pheasey Library should remain open for a further year to allow additional time for a sustainable solution to its future to be developed. He explained the potential for increasing social isolation and the number of vulnerable people in the area made this viable compared to the potential increases that could be required in the adult social care budget to help people who were currently living independent lives.

Resolved:

That the administration consider at its first Cabinet meeting of the financial year that due to the isolation and potential increase in vulnerable people and consequences to other budgets that the closure of Pheasey Library is postponed for 1 year for the community to come up

with a sustainable solution to running all library services in Pheasey Park Farm.

164/17 Save Remembrance Day Parades

The Committee heard a petition about Remembrance Day parades (RDP) that had received over 500 signatures.

Councillor Wilson introduced the petition and urged the Council to work with the local community to support the delivery of these important events. Councillor Murray explained how he felt RDP were a civic duty and that it was disappointing that the local community had to raise money to ensure they went ahead.

The Chair noted that the next item on the agenda also dealt with the issue of RDP and outlined recommendations to Cabinet that addressed the issues raised by the petition. Therefore the Committee noted the petition and moved on to discuss the next item.

Resolved:

That the petition be noted.

165/17 Interim report of the Remembrance Day Working Group

The Committee resolved to consider Appendix 3 to the interim report of the Remembrance Day Working Group in private session. During the meeting the appendix was not discussed in any detail so the below minute is a full account of the discussion that took place.

The Committee considered the third interim report of the Remembrance Day Working Group (RDWG).

Councillor Craddock, RDWG Lead Member, introduced the report. He highlighted the impact of the Police decision to no longer support traffic management at RDPs. He explained he was meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) on 13 March where he planned to raise the concerns set out in the RDWG report. He had concerns for the long term sustainability of RDPs. The cost of traffic management would be 20% higher in 2017 as the prices included in the report for 2016 did not include VAT as the Council is exempt from these charges. He called for the Council and PCC to work together to ensure these important parades continued.

The Leader of the Council reported that he thought it would be unlikely for the PCC to provide funding towards the costs of traffic management at RDPs. He explained that if the PCC provided funding for Walsall he would be under pressure to provide funding to other areas too.

A Member of the Committee stated that the Royal British Legion should be engaged at a national level to support RDPs. A further Member added that he did not think financially supporting RDPs should be a Council function.

During the course of the debate a Member challenged why Appendix 3 was an exempt paper. The Senior Democratic Services Officer explained the paper contained details of the financial or business affairs of others. The Member requested further legal advice on the issue outside of the meeting.

Resolved:

That:

- 1. The interim report and recommendations of the Remembrance Day Working Group be approved and forwarded to Cabinet for consideration;**
- 2. Councillor D. Barker be appointed to the working group as a voting member;**
- 3. Councillor J. Murray be appointed to the working group as a non-voting co-opted member.**

166/17 Active living centre performance

The Committee considered a report providing a statistical summary of the first six months operation of Bloxwich and Oak Park Active Living Centres.

The Portfolio Holder (Communities, leisure and culture) explained that performance at the new centres was very positive. Following questions she reported that usage figures had increased significantly and that income from direct debit members had doubled since the new centres opened. It was hoped that these figures would continue to rise as swimming lessons re-established themselves and the, currently being constructed, 3G football pitch at Oak Park opened.

The Chair asked for further information on the cost of the advertising 'wraparound' in the Walsall Chronicle and an estimate of how many new members it recruited. He also asked for clarification on why the parent and toddler session at Oak Park took place between 3-4pm as it prevented parents with school age children attending.

The Executive Director (Economy and Environment) highlighted an error in table 6 on page 54 of the report. The updated figures are shown in italics below:

Table 6 – Savings Proposals, Sport & Leisure

Saving ref	Detail of Saving / Efficiency	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total
37	Additional income from Active Living to fully recover costs of Darlaston Pool and Walsall Gala baths		£519,383	£783,559	£1,302,942
123	Additional income from the Active Living Centres	£875,444			£875,444
124	The Sports Development team to become self sustaining	£61,934			£61,934
	Total	£937,378	£519,383	£783,559	£2,240,320

Resolved:

That:

- 1. Members be provided with the costs of the ‘wraparound’ advertising feature in the Walsall Chronicle along with an estimate of how many new members it recruited;**
- 2. Members be provided with clarification on the scheduling of the parent and toddler class at Oak Park Active Living Centre.**

167/17 Areas of focus 2016/17

Resolved:

That the following items be considered at the next meeting of the Committee:

- 1. Proposed pilot on the use of identification for elections;**
- 2. Petition scheme review.**

168/17 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be 6 April 2017.

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.00 pm.

Signed:

Date: