

8 March 2016

Petition: Save Our Market

Ward(s) Willenhall South

Portfolio: Cllr A Andrew – Economy, Infrastructure & Development

Executive Summary:

A petition was presented to Council on 11 January 2016 by Councillor S. Coughlin entitled 'Save Our Market'.

The petition contains over 500 signatures and is worded as follows:

"We the undersigned support our Labour councillors in calling on the Conservative Administration at Walsall MBC not to increase market charges and safeguard Willenhall Market for the future"

The petition calls for the Council to withdraw the proposed increase in market licence fees by £5.00 which was included in the budget making process for 2016 / 17.

The report details the response of the Head of Regeneration and Development to this petition.

Reason for scrutiny:

In accordance with the Council's petitions scheme a petition which contains over 500 signatories is required to be reported to one of the Council's scrutiny and performance panels where the relevant senior officer will give evidence. The authority has determined that the response to such petitions must be given by either the Chief Executive, Executive Directors, Assistant Directors or Heads of Service. The Committee may also decide to call the relevant portfolio holder to attend the meeting

Recommendation:

That the Committee hear the petition and the response to it and consider whether to make any recommendations.

Background papers:

None

Resource and legal considerations:

There are no legal issues arising from this petition. The removal of the rental increase at Willenhall Market (together with the proposed increase of £5 a stall at Bloxwich Market) could have a financial impact of £44,200 resulting in the Council having to find alternative savings. Approximately £24,600 of this can be attributed to Willenhall Market. This is higher than Bloxwich because over the course of a year more stalls are let in Willenhall than Bloxwich.

Citizen impact:

Not increasing fees would have a positive financial benefit for market traders initially but longer term if the market fails to meet income targets and expenditure this could add to financial difficulties that the market already faces and would impact on market traders, shoppers and potentially other town centre traders if the market had to close.

Environmental impact:

There are no environmental implications relating to the increase in licence fees at Willenhall market.

Performance management:

Not increasing fees may have an impact on the Council's ability to continue to run a market in Willenhall.

Equality Implications:

There is no evidence that indicates any potential impact for people with protected characteristics. No EQIA has therefore been undertaken.

Consultation:

Consultation on this budget proposal was undertaken in the following ways:

- An online generic questionnaire
- A letter hand delivered to all regular traders at Willenhall and Bloxwich markets
- Face to face consultation with market traders
- Consultation with Business Partnerships in Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Walsall, Willenhall and Darlaston

Response to the proposal was mixed with some people supporting the proposal but suggesting that the Market Service could also make efficiencies in other ways – some of which are being implemented (see below). Others, notably market traders in Willenhall, whilst recognising rents were low compared to other markets, were concerned about the effect of the increase on them and the future viability of the Friday and Saturday markets in Willenhall where there are only a small number of stalls let compared with Wednesday.

Contact Officer:

Simon Tranter
Head of Regeneration & Development

☎ 01922 654723

Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk

Support Officer:

Helen Kindon
Team Leader – Markets

☎ 01922 654327

Helen.Kindon@walsall.gov.uk

Report

- 1.1 As members will be aware, the Council needs to make savings of £85million over the next four years and as such officers were asked to put forward suggestions of ways to contribute to this figure. In April 2013 licence fees increased by £5 a stall in Walsall Market but at the time it was felt that trading conditions in the district markets were such that licence fees should be frozen. This means that licence fees in the district centre markets (Willenhall and Bloxwich) haven't increased since 2005 and with rising costs and reducing budgets across the Council, it was felt that existing licence fees could no longer be maintained.
- 1.2 Walsall Market has relatively recently been subject to a fee increase and various temporary moves due to town centre developments and Network Rail electrification work have made trading conditions less favourable for many traders. For these reasons, together with further expected disruption over the next year or so whilst the new Walsall Market is implemented, the proposed fee increase is limited to the district markets for the time being. Fees in Willenhall are proposed to increase as follows:

	Wednesday	Friday	Saturday
Existing Fee	£12.10	£12.30	£13.30
Proposed Fee	£17.10	£17.30	£18.30
Percentage Increase	41.32%	40.65%	37.59%

- 1.3 For comparison, members should note that the Retail Price Index has increased by approximately 38% between 2005 and 2015.
- 1.4 Due to the fact that Willenhall Market is located in a Conservation Area, stalls cannot be left out permanently and the Council has to pay a contractor to supply, erect and dismount stalls several times a week. A relatively recent change to the Traffic Regulation Order in place in and around the market also prevents stalls being left out permanently as this would impact on deliveries to

existing retailers. This means that Willenhall Market costs the Council more to run than it receives in licence fees. Expenditure in 2015/16, including staff costs, stall hire and erection and cleansing costs is expected to be in the region of £125,000 with income from licence fees forecast to be £61,000 which means that Willenhall Market is expected to cost Walsall Council £64,000 to run.

- 1.5 In order to keep costs down, manage the market more effectively and improve the shopper experience, the following improvements have recently been made or are in the process of being made by the Markets Service which affect all markets:

- Staff restructure
- Approval by Cabinet of a new 'Market Policy'
- Recycling of waste.
- Procurement of electronic management system

- 1.6 The increase in licence fees in both Willenhall and Bloxwich will contribute to the reduction in the Council's budget deficit and will increase income by approximately £44,200 if there is no change to the number of stalls let.