

Corporate and Public Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

21 January 2016

Petitions: Save New Invention Library.

Ward(s) Willenhall North

Portfolios: Councillor A Harris, Community, Leisure and Culture

Executive Summary:

A petition was submitted on 17th December 2015 by Councillor Hicken opposing the proposed closure of New Invention Library in 2016/17 as part of the budget proposals concerning the Library Service.

The petition has over 900 signatures and is worded as follows:

'We the undersigned call on Walsall Council to reconsider the proposal to remove the library service from New Invention. We also call on the council to continue to provide a library service in the community and work with residents to maintain this vital service'.

The resource allocation process for the Council's budget 2016/17 to 2019/20 has required the Library Service to identify ways to significantly reduce its revenue budget, which currently stands at £4,320,998.

The proposal put forward for consideration is to close 7 libraries and cease the operation of the mobile library service. This would leave 9 libraries located in major district centres and the Housebound Library Service to deliver a core service to people across the Borough. New Invention Library is one of the 7 proposed for closure.

Reason for Scrutiny:

The petition to save New Invention Library has over 900 signatures, which requires it to be presented to the relevant Scrutiny and Performance Panel and for a response to be given by either the Chief Executive, Executive Directors, Assistant Directors or Heads of Service. The Portfolio Holder may also be required to attend.

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:

The 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.

Citizen Impact:

The closure of a local library will impact primarily on those people who are unable to travel to an alternative service point. For New Invention residents, the nearest alternative libraries are Bloxwich Library which is 2 miles from current library site or Willenhall Library which is 2.9 miles from current library site. In 2014/15, New Invention Library received 28,422 visits, issued 21,060 items and provided 3,222 computer sessions.

Environmental Impact:

New Invention Library is housed in a Council owned building among the shops on the Square at New Invention. As such, should the Library close, the building could not be demolished and another use would have to be found for the space.

Performance Management:

No implications

Equality Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and indicates that the closure of a local library service will have a negative impact on those who find it difficult to travel to another library, particularly for children and their parents, young people unemployed people, the elderly and people with a disability. The Library Service would seek to mitigate for this by the continued development of online services (including e-book downloads) and offering home visits to people who are housebound and their carers. Library Services have received a proposal from Beacon Primary School who are willing to provide book exchange facilities for the community from their premises. Officers are actively investigating this option. Library Services will continue to work directly with local schools and other organisations to provide children with access to books and information and to encourage literacy.

Consultation:

No decision on the proposals will be made until the analysis of consultation on the library service budget proposals has been fully considered and their impact understood. Consultation has taken place throughout November and December in the following ways:

- a) a generic survey (online and in hard copy)
- b) a service specific survey (online and hard copy)
- c) advertised drop-in sessions have been held in each of the libraries named in the proposal where senior Library Service managers could meet local people, answer their questions and gather their views.
- d) exit interviews with customers in every library and also street interviews to gather the views of non service users.
- e) focus groups have been held in each of the libraries proposed for closure
- f) letters have been sent to all local schools and to organisations and groups supporting people with protected characteristics.
- g) a similar letter has been sent to local community organisations seeking to assess their interest in a partnership to provide community book exchange facilities in the local area.

Initial analysis of the consultation in New Invention has highlighted:

Out of a sample of 1090 questionnaires received by 23rd December, 4.7% (47) came from people who use New Invention as their main library. Of these New Invention respondents: 23.4% said they would cease to use the library service completely if New Invention closed. 51% currently walk to the library. 85% regarded the library as very important to them personally and 89% regarded it as very important to the community.

The Focus Group held 15th December on was attended by 5 people and exit interviews and drop-in sessions have also taken place

The information gathered through this consultation will inform a report which will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 3 February 2016 and inform the budget presented to Council at its meeting on 25 February 2016.

Contact Officer:

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