

Council – 10 April 2017

Petition: Save Our Services

1.0 Summary

1.1 This report is in response to a petition calling on the council not to implement further cuts and work with others to demand the government reinstates funding to maintain our community.

1.2 The petition Save our Services submitted to the Council by Councillor Sean Coughlan on 23 February 2017 contained 2,340 signatures and is worded as follows:

Successive years of council cuts are now threatening to seriously undermine, and in some cases destroy, vital public services. These include some in which the most vulnerable people in our community rely. We call on the new council not to implement further cuts and work with others to demand the government reinstates funding to maintain our community.

1.3 The Council's Petition scheme provides that;

If a petition contains at least 1,500 signatures, it will be debated at a meeting of the council. This means that the issues raised in the petition will be discussed at a meeting to which all Councillors can attend and speak. The Council will endeavour to consider the petition at its next meeting although on some occasions this may not be possible and consideration will then take place at the following meeting. The petition organiser will be given 5 minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes. The council will decide how to respond to the petition at this meeting.

They may decide to take action that the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to ask for further information. Where the issue is one where the cabinet are required to make the final decision the Council will decide to make recommendations to the Cabinet. The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this and this will be published on the Council's website.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 That the content of the petition is noted.

3.0 Background information

3.1 It is a statutory requirement for a local authority to set a balanced budget. The budget is a financial representation of the organisation's plans for the coming financial year. Walsall Council exists to serve the people and communities of Walsall, by representing and working with them to protect and improve the quality of life for all, particularly the most vulnerable. This

must be done, however, within the resources available, and so the council must always work to ensure that public money is targeted to where it is most needed and used in the most efficient way possible.

- 3.2 Since 2010, this council has lost in the region of £100m in government funding coupled with increasing costs, this inevitably means that the council's expenditure and income budgets are out of balance. Unlike the government, local government is not allowed to operate a deficit budget, therefore having taken into account all efficiencies and income generating opportunities it is necessary to either reduce or stop some activities in order to balance the budget.
- 3.3 The Corporate Plan agreed at Council on 23 February 2017-2020, sets out the key priorities of the council going forward. The council has been successful in extending the support for children and families in local areas with the implementation of a new model for early help that sees services working closely together to better meets children's needs. Further money, £6m, is directed to support looked after children. Additional funding, £9.7m, is going into adult social care to support the growing demand for care. Waiting lists for assessment and care have been eradicated, meaning elderly and vulnerable adults are getting the care they need when they need it.
- 3.4 The council is very proactive in lobbying the government highlighting the impact of the funding reductions. It does this through a variety of means: such as letters to the relevant minister, responding to consultation exercises; and in conjunction with a variety of local and national organisations such as the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the Local Government Association (LGA), and the Association of Directors of Environment Economy Planning and Transport (ADEPT). A recent successful example of lobbying has been the announcement of additional, albeit short term, funding for adult social care, with Walsall receiving a total of £12.6m over the next three years.
- 3.5 The council, through its members and officers, will continue to press the government and its officers to provide the appropriate level of funding for this authority based on its needs.



James. T. Walsh
Chief Finance Officer
01922 652322
James.walsh@walsall.gov.uk