

**Corporate and Public Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

27 July 2015

Petitions: Save Rushall Library

Ward(s) Rushall Shelfield

Portfolios: Councillor A. Harris, Community, Leisure and Culture

Executive Summary:

A petition was submitted to Council on 26th February 2015 by Councillor L. Rattigan opposing the proposed closure of Rushall Library in 2016/17 as part of the budget proposals concerning the Library Service.

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

“We the undersigned request the Members of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council to reconsider their proposed closure of Rushall Library in 2016/17. Rushall Library is an important focal-point in Rushall Village. Closure would mean the loss of an important service. The building and the surrounding area would be adversely affected. We are sure the library could remain open and other community facilities and services could use the building.”

It should be noted that, the budget proposals with regard to the closure of Libraries was amended at the Council meeting on 26th February, to defer the proposed closure of any library in 2015/16 for 12 months. No decision was made about those libraries proposed for closure 2016/17, which would include Rushall. Officers are continuing to work with local community organisations to identify alternatives.

Reason for Scrutiny:

The petition to save Rushall Library has over 500 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 Panel note the content of the petition

Background Papers:

Cabinet report, 29 October 2014

Cabinet report, 17 December 2014

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 Rushall residents, the nearest alternative library is Walsall Central Library which is 1.8 miles from current library site or Aldridge Library which is 2.6 miles from current library site.

Environmental Impact:

Rushall Library is housed in a Council owned building and, as such, would no longer be used for their current purposes and would therefore become a liability to the Council while it remained empty and could attract anti-social behaviour.

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, the elderly and disabled, unemployed people. The Library Service would mitigate for this impact by more frequent visits to the area by the mobile library service, the continued development of online services (including ebook downloads) and offering home visits to people who are housebound and their carers. Library Services are working with schools and other organisations to give children access to books and are continuing to discuss the potential to provide local "book exchange" facilities with Manor Farm Community Association.

Consultation:

Consultation on the library service budget proposals has taken place via the

following methods:

- a) a generic survey (online and hard copy)
- b) generic drop-in sessions at libraries and other public buildings
- c) a service specific survey (online and hard copy)
- d) 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.
- e) face-to-face consultation interviews with customers in every library and also street interviews to gather the views of non service users.
- 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.

The information gathered through this consultation informed a report which was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 4 February 2015 and informed the budget presented to Council at its meeting on 26 February 2015.

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