

**8 September, 2015**

**Response to the Aldridge Manor House Paper and E-Petition submitted on 21<sup>st</sup>  
& 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2015**

**1. The Petition**

Petition: "To keep the Aldridge Manor House Youth Centre open as opposed to closing it in December 2015 (as proposed by the Council). For the Council to effectively engage with young people, parents and interested members of the community to agree, and to arrange for it to be run and developed by the Aldridge community in a more cost effective and sustainable manner"

**2. Response**

In April 2011, the Council's Cabinet agreed in principle to the closure and disposal of Aldridge Manor House as part of the Smarter Workplaces programme. The Smarter Workplaces programme was designed to reduce related buildings revenue costs and to raise income from capital receipts in response to on-going significant budget pressures across the public sector.

Significant consultation and engagement with young people and the community took place over 2 years. Various options for alternative venues for the youth club provision (currently three nights per week) were considered, however no suitable alternative was identified.

In the absence of a suitable solution, the closure of Aldridge Manor House was deferred most recently pending the outcome of the Targeted Youth Work Review. The Youth Support Services have continued to look for community based alternatives but unsuccessfully.

Local residents, including young people held a number of meetings to explore alternatives. Various further options for alternative venues for the youth club provision have been considered but again no suitable alternative has been identified.

The Council continue to face unprecedented budget pressures. As part of this wider budget setting process, Cabinet agreed on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015 to a reduction of £1.07m in the Targeted Youth Work budget for the two year period 2015-17, reducing it from £1.96m to £888k. This was subsequently approved by full Council. This has led to the proposed withdrawal of Council run centre based provision in Aldridge, along with other areas of the Borough, with youth work being provided through a mixture of community based and detached provision yet to be determined.

Aldridge Manor House continues to be identified for disposal to help support the overall financial position of the Council. From April 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 the Council is required to reduce its spend by a further £86m following significant savings already made over the last 4 years of £92m.

A report is currently being prepared for October Cabinet which:

- reflects on the review of Targeted Youth Work allied to the budget reduction
- proposes a new arrangement for the delivery of Targeted Youth work with:
  - funding for Council delivery at 40% of the remaining budget of £888,000 (i.e. £355,000) and that for independent commissioned providers at 60% of the available budget i.e. £533,000.
  - an increased role for independent commissioned providers and a Resource/Funding Allocation Model for which there are 3 options being consulted upon, that will determine the allocation of funding to different parts of Walsall (including Aldridge) based on variables of need, population and ward distribution.
  - a new, significantly reduced, configuration for direct Council delivery:
    - prioritising particular activities including the reduction of Anti Social Behaviour, support for community cohesion, targeted and vulnerable groups and capacity building
    - ceasing delivery of Council services from all centres other than Myplace
    - a major reduction in the number of full-time and part-time staff employed by the Council (reduction of 24.8 FTE posts and up to 54 staff).

The Council recognises the importance to the local community of the provision of youth work in Aldridge. Some young people may choose to access the Aldridge Youth Fellowship provision as the Aldridge Parish Church on Friday and Sunday evenings although it is recognised that this does attract a young age group. The Youth Support Services will continue to ensure that the community and young people are involved in decisions about the provision to be made. At their suggestion, the Council will work with local volunteers to support the development of a trust/charitable organisation to help develop and maintain youth work provision in the area and support the organisation or others to engage in the anticipated new arrangements for third sector delivery planned for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016.

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