

## **Council – 9 January 2017**

### **Petition – “Walsall Council Proposed Budget Cuts”**

#### **1. Summary**

- 1.1. This report is in response to a petition received in opposition to the draft budget proposal reference 21: Consider Cessation of Bowling Green and Cricket Wicket Provision, as approved by Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016 for public consultation.
- 1.2. The petition of over 1,700 signatures, “Walsall Council Proposed Budget Cuts”, expresses “concern over the proposed cessation of Bowling Greens and Cricket wickets”, and was submitted by Councillor Clarke to Democratic Services on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016.
- 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 the 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 decision and this will be published on our website.’

#### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Council consider the petition and debate the feedback of the consultation with regards to the proposed saving of £58,464 from the cessation of bowling green and cricket provision as detailed in this report

#### **3. Background Information**

- 3.1 Currently, the Council maintains bowling greens at Anchor Meadow, Darlaston Recreation Ground, King George V Playing Fields, Leamore Park, Oak Park, Palfrey Park, Pelsall, Pleck Park, Rushall, Walsall Arboretum and Willenhall

Memorial Park. The Council maintains cricket wickets at Broadway West Playing Fields, King George V Playing Fields and Pleck Park; of the two at the Walsall Arboretum, one is maintained by the Young People's Federation and the other has not been used for two years.

3.2 Bowling greens and cricket wickets would continue to be maintained at the Arboretum with alternative resources.

3.3 The charges for using these sites in 2016/17 are:

- Bowling Greens
  - Single game Per person £5.00
  - Club use – season Over five sessions/week £1,878.00  
Two to five sessions/week £936.00  
One session/week £611.00
  
- Cricket Wickets
  - Broadway West Season (Agreement) £1,348.60
  - King George V & Pleck Park Single game £68.00  
Season (annual hire) £1,223.00
  - Walsall Arboretum Single game £119.00  
Season (annual hire) £2,135.00

3.4 The total amount of income due to be received for 2016/17 is £7,500 for bowling greens and £1,866.60 for cricket wickets.

3.5 As part of the draft budget for 2017/18, a proposal for the cessation of bowling green and cricket wicket provision was approved by Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016 for public consultation.

3.6 Implementation of this proposal would achieve a budget saving of £58,464, but a loss of income of £9,366.60 per annum.

3.7 Feedback gathered through the Council's consultation on the draft budget proposals indicates that respondents are generally against the proposal.

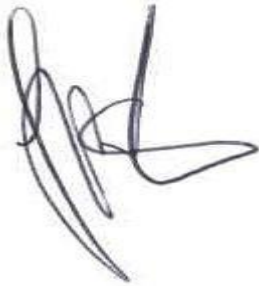
3.8 Respondents' main concerns were as follows:

- Reduction in social interactions
- Loss of activities and social opportunities;
- The impact on health to members with disabilities and health issues
- Increase burden on the National Health Service
- Lack of community connectedness

Respondents also noted that the cessation of maintenance may increase the risk of vandalism and anti-social behavior at the sites concerned.

3.9 Respondents have identified the following alternatives to the budget savings:

- The Council considers self management of bowling greens, where bowling clubs take over the management and maintenance of bowling greens through a formal lease or occupancy agreement with the Council.
- The Council considers charging peppercorn rent to bowling clubs with the agreement that the bowling clubs management team be responsible for the continued management and maintenance of the green.
- All bowling green users pay a contribution towards maintenance costs and hire fees to the Council regardless of covenant agreements; this will help the Council retain some income whilst cutting the expenditure bill.
- The Council considers increasing and restructuring hire fees, whilst ensuring fees are set at a comparatively affordable level to help subsidize shortfalls in maintenance costs.



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