

## Council – 12 January 2015

### Petitions – Streetly and Pheasey Park Farm Libraries

#### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report is in response to 2 petitions received opposing the closures of Streetly and Pheasey libraries respectively as part of budget proposals concerning the Library Service for 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- 1.2 The first petition, “Save Streetly library from closure”, contains in excess of 3,000 names and was presented to Council by Councillor Clarke on 17 November 2014. A similar petition has been completed online containing a further 370 signatures. The wording of both petitions, is as follows:
- 1.3 *Streetly library is an important community hub. It provides a host of facilities to both adults and children in addition to its core book lending purpose. These include IT access and training, local information provision and facilities for local schools. Were it to close the local area would suffer both economically and socially*
- 1.4 The second petition, “Save Pheasey Park Farm Library from Walsall Labour cuts”, contains in excess of 1,500 signatures, was presented to Cabinet by Councillor Bird on 17 December 2014 against a proposal to close Pheasey library. The petition is worded as follows:
- 1.5 *We the undersigned totally oppose the confirmed proposals by Walsall Labour to close Pheasey Park Farm Library. We are an isolated community and access to other facilities, that our council tax pays for, is very difficult. Our Library has volunteers that allows it to be open more days a week providing essential services for local people of all ages. We support our Local Councillors fighting for our Library and oppose Walsall Labour cuts.*
- 1.6 A similar petition has been received concerning another library, but does not contain the required number of signatures for consideration by Council.
- 1.7 The Council’s petition scheme provides that:
- 1.8 *‘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.*

- 1.9 *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’.*

## **2.0 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the content of the petition be noted and discussions continue with residents, relevant groups and individuals on budget proposals for 2015/16.

## **2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1. As part of the draft budget for 2015/16 there is a proposal to save £565,722 from library services which, if approved, would mean the closure of eight libraries from the current network of 16 - five in 2015/16 (Beechdale, Pheasey, South Walsall, Streetly and Walsall Wood) and a further three libraries in 2016/17 (Blakenall, New Invention and Rushall).
- 2.2 The Council’s consultation on the draft revenue budget proposals, approved by Cabinet on 29 October 2014, comprises two phases:
- a) Phase 1 (August to September 2014) where the focus was on gaining a better understanding of the priorities of those who live, work, visit or do business in the borough.
  - b) Phase 2 (November to early December 2014, with consultation on some service specific proposals closing on 4 January 2015) where feedback from this stage will help inform future decisions regarding the reshaping of future service delivery and the impact on residents and customers.
- 2.3 Consultation on the library service budget proposals has taken place via the following methods:
- a) a generic survey (online and hard copy)
  - b) a service specific survey (online and hard copy)
  - c) generic drop-in sessions at libraries and other public buildings
  - 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. Sue Grainger, Head of Libraries, Heritage and Arts attended Pheasey Library on Thursday, 11 December and Streetly Library on Friday, 12 December
  - 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. The letters ask them to

promote the consultation questionnaire and contain an offer to meet with members if requested.

- 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.
- h) a meeting between the Head of Libraries, Heritage and the Arts and representatives of the Save Streetly Library group.

2.5 Consultation on the budget proposal for the Library Service closed on 4 January 2015. A snapshot of consultation feedback was reported to Cabinet at its meeting on 17 December 2014 and Cabinet will respond to this, along with further consultation gathered up until 4 January 2015, at its meeting on 4 February 2015.

### **Background papers**

Cabinet report 29 October 2014

Cabinet report 17 December 2014

**Jamie Morris**

**Executive Director (Neighbourhood Services)**

23 December 2014