

## ASSEMBLY

22 FEBRUARY 2012

<b>Title: Response to Petition – Markyate Library</b>	
<b>Report of: Corporate Director of Adult &amp; Community Services</b>	
<b>Open</b>	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Wards Affected: All</b>	<b>Key Decision: No</b>
<b>Report Author:</b> Paul Hogan Divisional Director, Culture and Sport	<b>Contact Details:</b> Tel: 020 8227 3576 E-mail: paul.hogan@lbbd.gov.uk
<b>Accountable Divisional Director:</b>	Paul Hogan
<b>Accountable Director:</b>	Anne Bristow
<b>Summary:</b> <p>The Council has received a petition on 28 November 2011 containing 103 signatures from separate addresses in the Borough, requesting that the Council stop proposals to close the Markyate library as one of the savings options being considered as part of the 2012/13 budget round.</p> <p>The petition states:</p> <p><b>"Yet again they are trying to close our library &amp; yet again we aim to fight this. Please sign our petition to keep Markyate library open. We need this library to remain open for the sake of the elderly, disabled &amp; the local children, it is used &amp; valued by local residents who are unable to travel to the bigger main libraries. We would appreciate all your support"</b></p> <p>In accordance with the Council's procedures for petitions, the lead petitioner, Sandra Wiltshire, has been invited to the meeting of the Assembly to present the petition.</p> <p>At its meeting on 14 December 2011, Cabinet agreed a number of savings options for 2012/13, one of which was to close the Markyate library during 2012.</p> <p>To address the concerns raised in the petition, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport has initiated and is leading a consultation process with users of the library, including the lead petitioner, to investigate community management options for the library space.</p>	
<b>Recommendation(s)</b> <p>The Assembly is recommended to agree, for the reasons set out in this report, that it is unable to support the petition.</p>	

## **Reason(s)**

Under the Council's Petition Scheme as set out on the Council's web site, petitioners are entitled to a debate at full Assembly if the petition has the support of 100 or more signatures from different addresses in the borough.

As this petition reaches that threshold it has triggered the requirement for a debate at Assembly.

### **1. Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 The Council's budget-setting process for 2012/13 and beyond comes at a very challenging time for public services, and local government in particular. On the whole it is now not a question of adjusting services through small reductions or making efficiencies reasonably easily (achieved in previous years): the Council is faced with making some very difficult decisions about how to reduce service costs or in some cases whether to continue to provide those services at all.
- 1.2 In responding to the cuts imposed by the Coalition Government, the Council has had to make some extremely tough choices on how and where it spends its money. The Council is doing all it can to minimise the effects of these cuts on frontline services and will build on its record of delivering new and better ways of doing things in order to keep public services effectively running in these tough times. The Council has already taken a number of measures to increase efficiency and protect, as far as possible, frontline services.

### **2. Proposal and Issues**

- 2.1 At the meeting of the Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee (PAASC) held on 28 November 2011, Members reviewed a number of budget savings proposals, including the following:
  - closure of Wantz and Markyate libraries;
  - implementation of the break clause to allow the relocation of services from the Muirhead Quay depot to Valence Library;
  - creation of an integrated service in Thames View by bringing the library and children's centre service together; and
  - development of the services offered from Valence Library, Valence House and the adjacent park for children, young people and older people.

### **3. Options Appraisal**

- 3.1 The Cabinet decided to close the Markyate library at its meeting on 14 December 2011 and so it is not considered appropriate or necessary to revisit this decision.
- 3.2 The option to defer a decision on the closure of the Markyate library until after the Assembly had received the petition was discounted due to the need to finalise the 2012/13 budget in a timely way and because a consultation process had been initiated by the Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport that is intended to address the concerns raised in the petition.

## **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 At the PAASC meeting on 28 November 2011, the petition, which is the subject of this report, was handed in and library users and residents had the opportunity to ask questions about the proposal and to explain to Members why they thought the library should not be closed.
- 4.2 Members also considered issues such as the deliverability of the proposals, and their impact on the Council's agreed policy priorities.
- 4.3 The Divisional Director for Culture and Sport explained that there would still be a good quality and comprehensive library service available to residents within easy reach of Markyate library and that he would be happy to meet with customers to discuss alternative ways for them to continue to access services provided at the library.
- 4.4 The PAASC accepted the savings proposal with the recommendation that the upcoming libraries' strategy is scrutinised and plans for consultation are shared with the PAASC.
- 4.5 The Cabinet Member for Culture and Sport held a meeting in December 2011 at the Markyate library for concerned residents. A further productive meeting was held in January 2012 to discuss ways of maintaining existing community based activities at the site as well as options for expanding the range of services available.
- 4.6 A schedule of further meetings and support has been arranged to take this idea forward.

## **5. Financial Implications**

Implications verified by: Jonathan Bunt, Divisional Director - Finance  
Telephone and email: 020 8724 8427; [jonathan.bunt@lbbd.gov.uk](mailto:jonathan.bunt@lbbd.gov.uk)

- 5.1 The savings proposal relating to the closure of Markyate library was approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 14 December 2011 as part of agreeing a balanced budget for the 2012/13 financial year. The formal agreement of the budget and Council Tax for 2012/13 is elsewhere on this agenda and, should this proposal be reconsidered, a compensating saving of the same value would have to be found to ensure the budget remains in balance.

## **6. Legal Implications**

Implications verified by: Eldred Taylor - Camara  
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- 6.1 Under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, the Council has an obligation to make a scheme for the handling of petitions made to the authority. The Council has made such a scheme and the petition in this matter is brought and dealt with under the said scheme.

- 6.2 Where there are proposals for the closure or discontinuance of a service or services, the Equality Act 2010 requires that the Council has due regard to the effect such measures may have on the community this is best satisfied through an Equality Impact Assessment.
- 6.3 It is also necessary to establish that the Council can still satisfy its duty under section 7 of the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof and this should be so evidenced by an examination of the needs and a suitable service plan to continue to meet the duty.

## **7. Other Implications**

### **7.1 Property / Asset Issues**

Any potential asset transfer of the library building to a community management arrangement will be subject to Cabinet approval.

### **7.2 Customer impact**

The libraries equalities impact assessment indicates that women, older people and children and young people would be particularly affected by any reduction to the current level of library provision across the Borough.

However, a review of the geographic distribution of library facilities that will still be available to the Borough's residents indicates that a good quality and comprehensive library service will be within easy reach of 99% of local residents.

Also Markyate library service users will be able to access a book lending service and internet access at Dagenham and Valence libraries. Any customers of the toy library at Markyate library can get the same service at the nearby Dagenham library.

Pupils at Dorothy Barley School undertake organised visits to Markyate library on an occasional basis. Libraries staff will continue to deliver this service directly at the school on an outreach basis.

The library will continue to operate in its current format until September 2012. As the report outlines above, the opportunity to establish a community management arrangement for the future operation of the library building, which would include the continuation of the current toy library, is being investigated.

### **Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:**

ACS/SAV/22          Libraries' review

Minute of the Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee (28 November 2011)

### **List of appendices:**

None