<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Title:</strong></th>
<th>Petition re: Closure of the Civic Centre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Report of:</strong></td>
<td>Fiona Taylor, Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Open Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Wards Affected:</strong></th>
<th>Heath</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Report Author:</strong></td>
<td>John Dawe, Democratic Services Group Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountable Divisional Director:</strong></td>
<td>Fiona Taylor, Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountable Director:</strong></td>
<td>Chris Naylor, Chief Executive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contact Details:**
- Tel: 020 8227 2135
- E-mail: john.dawe@lbld.gov.uk

**Summary**

At the Cabinet on 16 December 2014 following consideration of a range of options, Members agreed a proposal to rationalise the Council’s corporate office portfolio in order to make budget savings which included the planned closure of the Civic Centre and its potential future use as a School. That decision led to the Council being presented with a petition from Jon Cruddas MP opposing the closure, which in accordance with the Council’s Petition Scheme was put before PAASC on 25 March 2015.

The petition called upon the Council to repeal the decision to convert the Civic Centre into a school, on the basis the current decision endangered the quality and accessibility of good public services for the residents of Dagenham.

Seeing the large number of residents who signed the petition and/or completed an accompanying survey, PAASC was of the view at that time that it would not do justice to those concerns by simply rejecting or supporting the terms of the petition, and in those circumstances a decision was deferred pending further information linked to the proposed closure. This included an independent financial evaluation of the costs involved in each option set down in the report, including those not originally short listed. However as there was no budget available to do this work the Cabinet at their meeting on 2 June 2015 were asked to consider the request, whom on balance declined to support the Select Committee’s proposal and provide the necessary funding from the Council’s reserves to commission the evaluation.

This decision as reported to PAASC on 24 June 2015 was challenged by Members’ who having regard to the provisions of the Constitution were of the view that the request for funding should have been referred to the Assembly and not the Cabinet. As a consequence it was decided to seek the Monitoring Officer’s opinion before any further consideration of the matter.
The Monitoring Officer reported back to the Committee in September 2015 that the Constitution stated that funding and expenditure was a Cabinet function as set out in Part 2 Chapter 6 paragraph 2.1(i) and that there was no supplementary provision that permitted the Assembly to make an allocation of resources (Part 2 Chapter 4).

Notwithstanding this the Select Committee decided to seek further independent legal advice or otherwise, as they maintained the view that the request for funding should have been referred to the Assembly for a decision.

At the last meeting on 22 March 2016 it was noted that it had been approaching 12 months since the petition was presented for a decision. However the representative of the lead petitioner was not able to attend, and in the knowledge that a further report was due to be presented to the Cabinet regarding developments as to the future use of the building it was decided to defer a final decision on the matter until this meeting.

The Cabinet at their meeting on 19 April 2016:

considered a further report on the rationalisation of Corporate Office Portfolio and with regard to the Civic Centre, decided that in order to expand the scope for opportunities and contribute to the objective of raising educational attainment in the community, to extend the potential future use of the Civic Centre from the original stated objective of a secondary school to a wider educational use. Importantly the proposal included the intention that any negotiations with potential future users of the building would require that part of the building would continue to be available for civic purposes, such as council meetings.

In the light of this decision Jon Cruddas, MP, the lead petitioner has expressed his thanks to the Council in recognising the strength of local opinion and responding in a positive fashion to residents concerns highlighted through the presentation of the petition.

Recommendation(s)

PASSC is asked to note the report and that no further action will be taken in respect of the petition.

Reason(s)

The number of signatures on the petition exceeded the threshold of 1500 which triggered a debate at the Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee.

1. Financial Implications

   Implications completed by: Jonathan Bunt, Strategic Director of Finance and Investment

   1.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.
2. Legal Implications

*Implications completed by: Dr. Paul Feild, Senior Governance Solicitor*

2.1 There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report. The Public Accounts and Audit Select Committee in receipt of the Petition is not acting in a statutory scrutiny function. The Constitution provides at Part 2, Chapter 8, paragraph 2.3(a) that it is a locally determined decision that within their terms of reference each Select Committee will be responsible for receiving petitions regarding services within their terms of reference.

**Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:** None