

**SPECIAL MEETING OF SELECT COMMITTEE
ON REGENERATION, CULTURE AND
ADULT EDUCATION**

Wednesday, 24th October, 2007 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley

PRESENT:-

Councillor C Wilson (Chairman)
Councillor Mottram (Vice Chairman)
Councillors D Blood, Cotterill, Jackson, Jones, Rahman, Southall, Tyler,
Mrs Wilson and Woodall

Officers

Assistant Director Corporate Estate Services (Acting Lead Officer to the
Committee) and Mr J Jablonski (Directorate of Law and Property)

Also in Attendance (by invitation)

Councillor Fraser-Macnamara (Deputy Leader) (Chairman of the
Meeting of Cabinet held on 12th September, 2007)
Councillor Evans (Cabinet Member for Housing)
Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services (together with the
Assistant Director Libraries, Archives and Adult Learning and the
Assistant Director Building Services

and thirty three members of the public.

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APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of
Councillors Crumpton, Tomkinson and K. Turner.

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SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was reported that Councillors Mrs. Wilson, Cotterill and D. Blood had
been appointed as substitute members for Councillors Crumpton,
Tomkinson and K. Turner respectively for this meeting of the Committee
only.

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DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Tyler declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 (Call-In Decision - Providing a Modern Library Service in Dudley M.B.C.- Modernisation Programme) in that he is the Chair of Wallheath Cyber Centre mentioned in the response to question 3.8 in the Responses to Members questions on the improvement plans for Dudley Library Services.

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PETITIONS

It was reported that the following petitions had been received and referred to the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services:-

- (1) From parents, children and residents objecting to the closure of the library at the Brook School.
 - (2) From persons wishing to register their strong objections to the closure of the Dudley Wood Library.
 - (3) From persons wishing to register their strong objections to the closure of Quarry Bank Library, together with a letter of concern from a resident of Quarry Bank at the proposed closure.
 - (4) From local residents and users objecting to the closure of Wallheath Library; and
 - (5) Two petitions from residents wishing to register their opposition to the closure of Woodside Library.
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PUBLIC FORUM

As part of his introductory remarks, the Chairman referred to the time limit of thirty minutes that would apply to the asking of questions by members of the public and to the limit to a maximum of five minutes for each questioner within the thirty minutes allowed.

The Chairman then asked the following persons, who had indicated a wish to speak, to address the Committee regarding their concerns in respect of the particular library indicated and, in respect of the last speaker, regarding the staffing matter raised:-

- (a) Ms. K. Downing - Woodside Library
- (b) Ms. H. Rich - Library at the Brook School

- (c) Mr. B. Gennett - Quarry Bank Library
- (d) Mr. B. Hall - Wallheath Library
- (e) Ms. J. Jesson - Dudley Wood Library; and
- (f) Mr. D. Hickman in relation to issues and implications arising from the proposed reduction in staffing levels at Stourbridge Library.

Arising from the concerns expressed by the above-named persons, the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services responded in turn to the points raised.

In addition to the comments made at the meeting, Ms. J. Jesson also circulated at the meeting pictures in respect of access points to the possible Link Library location for Dudley Wood and referred to comments made by the Priest in Charge of St. John's Church, Dudley Wood, regarding her concerns at the closure of the library in Dudley Wood.

In respect of comments made by Mr. Hickman, it was also stated that the professional issues that he had raised could be dealt with separately outside of the meeting.

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CALL-IN DECISION - PROVIDING A MODERN LIBRARY SERVICE IN DUDLEY M.B.C. - MODERNISATION PROGRAMME

A report of the Acting Lead Officer was submitted on the decision of the Cabinet at a meeting held on 12th September, 2007 to approve the plans for modernising the library service and the proposed implementation plan. The decision had subsequently been called-in at the request of five elected Members, from two political parties, of this Select Committee, in accordance with the rules in the Constitution. Accordingly, this special meeting of the Committee had been arranged to scrutinise the following decision of the Cabinet:-

- (1) That the plans for modernising the Dudley Library Service as set out in the report submitted to the meeting, be approved and that the implementation of the plans be supported.
- (2) That the Council be recommended:-
 - (a) That the disposal of the Council's assets as identified in paragraph 20 of the report submitted to the meeting be approved, and that the capital receipts from such disposals be used to contribute towards financing the library modernisation programme; and

- (b) That the additional expenditure for the library modernisation programme be approved, and the Capital Programme be amended accordingly, as set out in paragraph 13 of the report submitted to the meeting.

A copy of the report submitted to the Cabinet at its meeting held on 12th September, 2007 on this matter was attached as an Appendix to the report submitted.

Also circulated to Members was a copy of Responses to Members questions on improvement plans for Dudley Library Services; correspondence from Ian Pearson, MP and the response of the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services to that correspondence and exempt information relating to anticipated capital receipts, in respect of a question, numbered 23, and response, and further detail set out as Appendix 16 of the responses to Members questions. In addition, the letter of concern from a resident of Quarry Bank referred to in Minute 36 above had also been circulated to Members of the Committee.

The Chairman in his opening remarks in relation to this matter asked that Members of the Committee restrict their questions to matters of clarification only to the responses given by the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services referred to in the documentation submitted.

Following the initial comments made, the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services then read out, and elaborated upon, the points made in the Introductory Statement included with the Responses to Members questions on improvement plans for Dudley Library Services.

Following the Introductory Statement, consideration was then given to the responses to the twenty three main, and other, supplementary, questions raised by Members in the order indicated in the documentation, to which the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services and the two Members invited to attend responded, as appropriate, together with the other officers also in attendance.

In commenting on the responses given, Members referred in particular to facts and figures presented that were disputed; that questions raised had not been adequately addressed; the lack of consultation with local people on the proposals; the need for libraries to be seen as a local community facility, easily accessible to the public and that Link Libraries were not perceived to be an adequate substitute for a present library facility.

In responding to the points raised and concerns expressed, the Director of Adult, Community and Housing Services, the invited Members and other officers present, commented in particular that, as had been stated, and, in so far as they were prepared by the current management of the service, the facts and figures presented were relevant and accurate and that they stood by the detail presented; clarified further points that it was considered had not been addressed and referred to consultation arrangements that had been carried out for example through the customer consultation programme and the consultation that would take place following the establishment of the policy direction by the Cabinet by the use of local community fora which would be established by locality managers in the five established areas of the Borough so that consultation on the next steps regarding the location of Library Links and the development of service could be undertaken.

Mention was also made of the endorsement of the proposals by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the relevant Minister in the House of Commons which, as stated, would mean that the modernisation proposals would lead the Council to meeting all ten of the National Standards for Libraries.

As there were no requests for clarification of the information contained in the exempt information circulated regarding anticipated capital receipts, the Committee did not go into private session.

Following the consideration given to the responses to Members questions on improvement plans for Dudley Library Services and the comments made arising therefrom, a proposal was moved and seconded to the effect that the Committee recommend the Cabinet not to close the five libraries due for closure. This matter was put to the vote and the proposal was lost.

Further discussion then ensued and it was subsequently:-

RESOLVED

That this Committee having heard all of the relevant evidence and the views of the public present, support the proposed modernisation of the Library service and ask that all of the views expressed here tonight are fully taken into account during the consultation stage of the process and that we further ask that the Cabinet ensure that, where appropriate, the re-provided facilities are put in place before any libraries are de-commissioned.

The meeting ended at 9.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN