

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Council</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>18 December 2015</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Petition for debate – Ross-on-Wye library</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Cabinet member – contracts and assets</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Key Decision**

This is not an executive decision.

## **Wards Affected**

The library is located in Ross East ward but is part of the Countywide library service.

## **Purpose**

To consider a petition received bearing more than 7,000 signatures and therefore requiring debate by Council.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**THAT: Council determine its response to the petition.**

## **Alternative options**

- 1 The council's petitions scheme provides that when a petition is debated by Council, Council may decide to take the action the petition requests, not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate, or to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee. Where, as in this case, the issue is one on which the council executive are required to make the final decision, the council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.

## **Reasons for recommendations**

- 2 The petition contains more than 7,000 signatures (7,639 of which 2,245 are from people not resident in the county) and the council's petitions scheme requires that the petition is therefore debated by Council.

## Key considerations

- 3 A petition has been received from the Ross Library Development Group. The petition states: *“We the undersigned strongly request that Herefordshire Council ensure that the library service in Ross-on-Wye is retained to provide the comprehensive and efficient service for the Town that we currently enjoy.”*
- 4 A supporting statement submitted with the petition is appended.

### Procedure for debating the petition

- 5 The petitions scheme provides that the petition organiser will be given up to three minutes to present the petition at the meeting and the petition will then be discussed by councillors. A maximum of 30 minutes will be allowed at any meeting to consider up to three petitions, however, this may be extended at the discretion of the chairman.
- 6 The petition will therefore be discussed as follows:
- The chairman will invite the petition organiser to present the petition.
  - The petition organiser will move to the allocated seat and will have up to three minutes to present the petition. The petition organiser will then return to their seat in the public gallery and participate no further in the meeting.
  - The cabinet member – contracts and assets will reply to the petition and propose a response for which a seconder will be sought.
  - Council will then debate the matter. The Council’s normal rules of debate will apply.
  - Council will formulate its resolution and refer the petition to the executive.

### Comment

- 7 Council will recall that two petitions relating to the library service were submitted to Council in September 2015. The first, containing 553 signatures, was titled: help save Belmont library: *“we the undersigned protest most strongly and totally oppose any measures to close this invaluable community service”*. The second containing 3,516 signatures was submitted by the Friends of Leominster library: *“Herefordshire Council has proposed the closure of Leominster public Library and Services. We the undersigned, hereby call on Herefordshire Council to allow Leominster Public Library and Services to remain open to the public and managed by a professional librarian”*.
- 8 The Council’s published response to these petitions is: *“The recent budget consultation presented a number of concept saving and income generation ideas to inform Herefordshire Council Cabinet on the difficult decisions to address budget pressure as a result of reduced government grant.”* The response also notes that any further decision regarding the future delivery of the library service will be subject to wider public consultation”.

## **Community impact**

- 9 Correspondence received as part of the budget consultation, previous consultations and national research demonstrate the well-being, health and educational benefits of a library service.

## **Equality duty**

- 10 None in relation to this decision; in determining its response to the petition the executive will need to have regard to the public sector equality duty and any information provided in a relevant equality impact assessment.

## **Financial implications**

- 11 None in relation to this decision; in determining its response to the petition the executive will need to have regard to the resources available to the council. There are no budget reduction proposals in the draft medium term financial strategy which would impact on library service provision in Ross on Wye in 2016/17.

## **Legal implications**

- 12 The issue raised in this petition will be debated at a meeting of Council in accordance with the Constitution.
- 13 The duty to provide a library service is found in Section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and provides that 'it shall be the duty of every library authority to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons desiring to make use thereof.' When fulfilling its duty under section 7, a local authority must have regard to the desirability:
- 'Of securing that facilities are available for the borrowing of or reference to books and other printed matter, pictures, gramophone records, films and other materials'.
  - That these facilities are sufficient in number, range and quality to meet the general and special requirements of adults and children.
  - Of encouraging children and adults to make full use of the library service.

## **Risk management**

- 14 There are no implications in relation to this decision. In determining a response to the petition the executive will need to have regard to any relevant risks and opportunities.

## **Consultees**

- 15 None.

## **Appendices**

Save Ross Library Petition – (supporting statement)

## **Background papers**

- None identified

### **Save Ross Library Petition (supporting statement)**

“In Herefordshire Council’s Budget Income & Savings proposals they are proposing to withdraw customer services and libraries along with access to public computers in the Market Towns including Ross-on-Wye.

Ross-on-Wye has a very modern purpose built award winning library building that serves the Town and the whole of South Herefordshire with a wide variety of library based services. It is the only Herefordshire Council Library in HR9.

In addition to standard books and reference books to help students, talking books for the blind and large print books for those with poor eyesight, the library service in Ross offers many events to encourage children of all ages to value reading and develop an enquiring mind. It is also part of “Books on Prescription.”

#### **But really LIBRARIES are so much more than Books!**

The access to computers is a well-used and highly valued service for those members of the community who do not otherwise have IT access, this is calculated at 25% of the community (Office of National Statistics 2015).

Our Ross library is also a hugely valued facility that provides a safe tranquil meeting place for young and old where they can study, explore local history, catch up with papers and journals or view the many exhibitions that are held in the Dennis potter room, which is also a bookable meeting space and is used all year round. Meeting rooms and affordable gallery spaces are **very scarce** in Ross.

Ross has had a free library/reading room since 1873 when Thomas Blake gifted the Free Library at 20 Broad Street to the people of Ross in perpetuity. Herefordshire Council decided to sell that building, but the people of Ross were compensated with a new purpose built building to house our current Library.

Taking into account the above facts, we the undersigned strongly request that the Herefordshire Council ensure that the Library Service in Ross-on-Wye is retained to provide the comprehensive and efficient service for the town that we currently enjoy.”