



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All Wards

COUNCIL

24th November 2016

**PETITIONS FOR DEBATE BY FULL COUNCIL – BELGRAVE LIBRARY AND
BELGRAVE LUNCH CLUB**

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

1. INTRODUCTION

A petition has been received which asks the City Council to withdraw any plan to close the Belgrave Library and move the facility to Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre and to withdraw plans to alter the lunch club provision at Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre.

The Council's Petitions' Scheme (adopted in September 2014) states that any petition that receives 1,500 or more valid signatures, the lead petitioner may ask that it be subject to a debate at Full Council. The lead petitioners have indicated that they wish their petition to be subject to a debate.

A count of the unverified petition indicates that 6,126 people have signed the petition however the Council does not verify numbers of signatories once the 1500 threshold is reached.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is recommended to consider the petition and make any recommendations in accordance with the Petitions' Scheme.

3. REPORT

The petition received from Belgrave Lunch Club Committee and the Belgrave Network has met the criteria of 1,500 signatures of people who have provided an address in Leicester of where they live, work or study. The petition is in the following terms:

"We the undersigned firmly oppose Leicester City Council's plan to:

- 1) *Close down the Belgrave Library with the intention of moving it to the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre. There is no room for books, computers, tables and other resources inside the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre and*

this will mean downscaling of the services. Both buildings are regularly and heavily used. Belgrave library is an invaluable resource for the pupils and families of local schools. Access to high quality literature is particularly essential during this period economic hardship. Losing Belgrave Library will have a massively damaging impact on the education and future life chances of the young people in the area.

- 2) *Alter the provision of meals for the lunch club members. The kitchen at the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre is adequate to provide freshly cooked and culturally appropriate vegetarian meals for the elderly, disabled and diabetic members of the lunch club. Members are paying £4.20 per plate per day. This lunch club is vitally important for the vulnerable and lonely elderly people who come and socialise at the centre.*
- 3) *We strongly oppose Leicester City Council's plan to close the Belgrave Library and to relocate it to the Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre.*

The lead petitioners have been invited to speak on their petition for five minutes to be followed by a Councillor debate for a maximum of 15 minutes.

Following the debate, the Council can decide how to respond to the petitions and may decide to:

- Recommend to the Executive to either take or not take the action the petition requests.
- Recommend to the Executive a different course of action as a result of the debate.
- Commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee.

Following the Council meeting the petition organisers will receive written confirmation of this decision.

The Director of Environmental and Neighbourhood Services has provided some background information below:

Response to Belgrave Petition

The Transforming Neighbourhood Services programme is scoped to identify different ways of organising how services are delivered within the neighbourhoods of the city of Leicester, with a view to reducing the costs of delivery by around 30% while maintaining the quality of the services.

The programme approach is to consider each of 6 geographical areas in turn to identify methods by which the service delivery model can be transformed through opportunities to co-locate services and make better use of the assets available.

The services in scope of the programme are:

- Neighbourhood Services including libraries and community centres
- Leicester Adult Skills & Learning Service
- Neighbourhood based customer services
- Youth Centres

The petition has arisen from a consultation exercise which puts forward proposals which would save 30% of the running costs of a range of council buildings in the North East of the city. The area covers Belgrave, Rushey Mead, Troon, Humberstone & Hamilton and Thurncourt wards.

The background to the project is that a saving is necessary due to severe reductions in the budget available to the city council from the government. The principle behind the exercise is to prioritise the protection of local services offered rather than focussing on retaining all of the council buildings in the area.

The North East is the fourth area of the city which has been subject to the process within the Transforming Neighbourhood Services project. In each area, an initial public engagement period is undertaken before proposals are developed and for consultation.

The public engagement exercise was undertaken in the North East area between 6 June – 17 July 2016. The aim was to show the need for change and to gather suggestions from the local community about possible ways in which solutions to the financial challenge can be met.

Proposals for the north east area were developed based on feedback from the engagement findings and service and buildings data collected. A consultation was held on the proposals between 12 September – 23 October 2016.

A number of proposals were made for the two buildings in the Belgrave ward, Belgrave Library and Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre. The proposals included those referred to in the petition:

- Consider moving Belgrave Library into Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre
- Change lunch club provision to free up some of the kitchen space for more community use. A basic kitchen facility will be in place for community group use.
- Explore a range of options for disposal of any surplus buildings

Other proposals for the Belgrave buildings are:

- Consider moving adult learning classrooms to Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre to deliver more English language and other classes
- Redecorate some areas of Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre including the main hall
- Review room hire arrangements to free up more space for additional activities and to increase income
- Install library and customer self-serve terminals
- Explore car parking controls to improve availability for centre users

The proposal to amalgamate the library and Neighbourhood Centre in Belgrave is similar to those which have been considered in other parts of the city and have led to the development of multi-service centres. The rationale for the proposal is that the buildings are very close to one another and that by refocussing services, it may be possible to bring them together in a single building.

The proposal around the lunch club is to aim to find a new way of delivering the service at the centre at less cost while releasing more space for other groups to use and to accommodate more services in the buildings.

There has been a substantial response to the consultation exercise across the north east area and particularly in the Belgrave ward. There have been 1,436 completed questionnaires and around 780 people have attended meetings. All of the responses are currently being considered before an executive decision for the area as a whole is made by the City mayor and Executive. Both of these ideas are proposals and no decision has been made on the North East as yet. However an early indication has been given that Belgrave Library will not be relocated to Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre.

4. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Financial Implications

The petition submitted relates to proposals that form part of the wider Transforming Neighbourhood Services Programme. The programme has financial savings attached to it and options being proposed will have financial consequences. Any alternative options considered will have to assess the impact on the delivery of savings expected to be achieved.

Alison Greenhill, Director of Finance, 374401

4.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. Any legal implications which may arise out of the substantive issue will be considered as part of any subsequent Executive decision.

Kamal Adatia, City Barrister and Head of Standards, 371401

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph References Within the Report
Equal Opportunities	N	
Policy	N	
Sustainable and Environmental	N	
Crime and Disorder	N	
Human Rights Act	N	
Elderly/People on Low Income	N	
Corporate Parenting	N	

Health Inequalities Impact	N	
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6. BACKGROUND PAPERS – LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None

7. CONSULTATIONS

None.

8. REPORT AUTHOR

Matthew Reeves
Senior Democratic Support Officer.