

Local Members' Interest
Affects Stafford Members

**Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee
7 March 2014**

**Petition – Proposed removal of the Library, Gallery and other facilities
from the Shire Hall and sale of the building**

Recommendation

1. That the Committee considers the evidence given by the Director for Place and Deputy Chief Executive in response to the Petition regarding the proposed removal of the Library, Gallery and other facilities from the Shire Hall and sale of the building, and decides what, if any, action to take in response.

Report of the Scrutiny and Support Manager

Summary

What is the Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?

2. Under the Council's Petition Scheme (in Section 4 of the Council's Constitution), named Senior Officers are required to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings to give evidence about the issues raised by petitions with over 2,500 signatures. A petition with 2,915 signatures (made up of 1960 hand written signatures and 955 signatures on the e-petition) has been received about the proposed removal of the Library, Gallery and other facilities from the Shire Hall and sale of the building.
3. The Director for Place and Deputy Chief Executive is the Senior Officer named in the Petitions scheme who is responsible for the issues outlined in the petition and she has been invited to attend the meeting to respond to the issues it raises. Members have an opportunity to ask questions and will then have to decide what, if any, action to take in response.
4. The Committee may decide to make recommendations to Cabinet or Cabinet Members, conduct further scrutiny enquiries or take no action if no action is required. A copy of the Committee's findings will be sent to the petitions organiser following the meeting.

Report

Background

5. Chapter 2 of The Local Democracy, Economy Development and Construction Act 2009¹ required the County Council to adopt a petitions scheme setting out how it deals with petitions from local residents. Section 16 of the Act requires the Council to make provision within the scheme for named Senior Officers to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committees to give evidence in response to petitions with a specified number of signatures agreed by the Council
6. The County Council agreed its petition scheme at its meeting on 20 May 2010 and specified that the threshold for petitions requiring a Senior Officer to give evidence would be 2,500 signatures. The Petitions Scheme can be found attached to Section 4 – Citizens Rights of the Council's Constitution.
7. On 13 February 2014 Mrs M Compton submitted a petition with 2,915 signatures to the full Council meeting. The petition was organised by Mrs Compton and opposed the proposed removal of the Library, Gallery and other facilities from the Shire Hall and the sale of the building. The petition raises concerns about the impact of the proposal, stating that the Shire Hall, in its present form, is an essential part the Stafford's Cultural Quarter (the Public Library, Gallery, Theatre and William Salt Library). In addition the facility currently houses the Sensory Room which the petition highlights as an indispensable resource for children, especially those with Special Needs. The petition also raises concerns that the sale of the Shire Hall may lead to a use which is not appropriate to a building of such historic and cultural significance to the people of Stafford. As this petition met the criteria for a Senior Officer to attend a Select Committee meeting, once the number of signatures had been verified Mrs Compton was advised that arrangements would be made for the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive to attend a meeting in due course.
8. A timetable for dealing with the debate on the petition is attached (Appendix 1) giving the opportunity for the petition organiser and local Members to address the Committee and answer questions as well as the Director's own evidence.
9. When the Committee has concluded its discussions on the petition a copy of its deliberations and findings will be sent to Mrs Compton as the petition organisation setting out what further action, if any, will be taken.
10. **Link to Strategic Plan** – Responding to petitions and giving members of the public the opportunity to attend meetings to hold senior officers to account contributes to the priority of ensuring **Staffordshire's people are involved in shaping their quality of life**. The specific issues raised by the petition relate to the priority that **Staffordshire communities can access, enjoy and benefit from a range of learning, recreational and cultural activities**.
11. **Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity** – The Committee may decide to undertake further scrutiny work on the issues raised by the petition.

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/contents>

12. **Equalities and Legal Implications** – The Committee will need to have regard to any equalities issues in deciding what action to take. Any action the Committee takes will have to be within their powers set out in the Council's constitution
13. **Resource and Value for Money Implications** – The Committee should have regard to the resource and value for money implications of any action they propose to take.
14. **Risk Implications** – The Committee should have regard to the risk implications of any action they propose to take.
15. **Climate Change Implications** – The Committee should have regard to the climate changes implications of any action they propose to take.
16. **Health Impact Assessment screening** – N/a

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Appendices/Background papers

County Council's Petition Scheme (Section 4 of the Constitution)

Timetable for dealing with petition for Senior Officers giving evidence at Select Committees

Process	People	Timings
Lead Petitioner and Local Member to address the Committee on the content of the petition	<i>Mrs Compton</i>	<i>10 minutes (+ questions)</i>
Senior Officer to give evidence and respond to questions from Committee Members	<i>Helen Riley, Director for Place and Deputy Chief Executive</i>	<i>10 minutes (+ questions)</i>
Committee deliberation and outcome (i.e. do they wish to make any recommendations to the Officer or to Cabinet)	Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Members	

NB The Chairman may direct questions from Committee members to individual speakers during this process.