

| |
|---------------------------------|
| Local Members' Interest |
| Maureen Compton – Stafford Town |

**Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee
15 December 2016**

**Petition – Keeping Arts and Community Services at The Shire Hall,
Stafford**

Recommendation

1. That the Committee considers the evidence given by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities in response to the Petition regarding a request to keep arts and community services at the Shire Hall, Stafford, 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?

1. 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 3,068 signatures has been received from Lisa Henderson regarding a request to keep arts and community services at the Shire Hall, Stafford. Specifically the petition states: "The Shire Hall is a central location in Stafford that enables the community to engage in the arts. If it is shut we will lose a valuable space that provides a range of services for the local community and supports many vulnerable people. Among many others services the building is home to:

An exhibition space for contemporary art;

A craft shop that supports British craft makers;

A multi-sensory room used by families with young children and people with disabilities;

A calm environment that is utilised by mental health support groups;

The historical courtroom and holding cell both of which have been used for film and television work on major networks;

Artist led workshops."

We would like the review of the use of the Shire Hall building to keep the services currently available in place and to improve them. We would like it to be a participative process that allows staff and the wider public to have their say on the future of such a valuable asset to the community. We enclose 3,068 signatures from supporters of the Gallery and its services." Please note that in addition to the figure of 3,068, 115 of the signatures on the petition were from visitors living outside Staffordshire.

2. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities 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 action, if any, to take in response.
3. 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 petition organiser following the meeting.

Report

Background

4. 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.
5. 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 of the Constitution – Citizens and the Council. A link is given at the end of this report.
6. A timetable for dealing with the debate on the petition is attached (Appendix 1) giving the opportunity for the petition organiser and the local Member to address the Committee and answer questions as well as the Director's own evidence.
7. When the Committee has concluded its discussions on the petition a copy of its deliberations and findings will be sent to Lisa Henderson, as the petition organiser, setting out what further action, if any, will be taken.
8. **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 Operating Principle of evolving our relationship with our residents – specifically, give a stronger voice and more clout to the people of Staffordshire on the issues that matter to them, not just those issues that we have a statutory responsibility to deliver. The specific issues raised by the petition relate to the Priority 'Enjoying Life - Strengthen public confidence in the county as a great place to live with lots of opportunities to enjoy life.'

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity – The Committee considered the Future Operating Model for the Staffordshire Arts Service at its meeting on 13 September 2016. A petition with 2,915 signatures (including an e-petition) was presented to full Council on 13 February 2014 by Councillor Maureen Compton

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

“asking the Council to reverse and reconsider the proposals to remove the library, gallery and other facilities from the Shire Hall and sell the building. The Shire Hall in its present form is an essential part of Stafford’s Cultural Quarter (Public Library, Gallery, Theatre and William Salt Library). In addition it houses the Sensory Room which is an indispensable resource for children especially those with Special Needs. 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 Staffordshire.” This petition was considered by this Committee on 7 March 2014.

9. **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.
10. **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.
11. **Risk Implications** – The Committee should have regard to the risk implications of any action they propose to take.
12. **Climate Change Implications** – The Committee should have regard to the climate changes implications of any action they propose to take.
13. **Health Impact Assessment screening** – n/a.

Contact Officer

Name and Job Title: Tina Gould, Scrutiny and Support Manager
Telephone No.: 01785 276148
Address/e-mail: tina.gould@staffordshire.gov.uk

Appendices/Background papers

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

<http://moderngov.staffordshire.gov.uk/documents/s85240/Re%20Write%20Section%204.pdf>

Timetable for dealing with petition for Senior Officers and Member(s) giving evidence at Select Committees

| Process | People | Timings |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Lead Petitioner to address the Committee on the content of the petition | <i>Lisa Henderson</i> | <i>5 minutes (+ questions)</i> |
| Local Member to address the Committee on the content of the petition | <i>Maureen Compton, County Councillor for Stafford Town. Note by Clerk: Mrs Compton has indicated that she is not available to attend and will submit a written response. This will be circulated and published on receipt.</i> | <i>(5 minutes (+ questions))</i> |
| Senior Officer to give evidence and respond to questions from Committee Members | <i>Helen Riley, Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities</i> | <i>5 minutes (+ questions)</i> |
| Committee deliberation and outcome (i.e. do they wish to make any recommendations to the Officer or to Cabinet) | <i>Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee Members</i> | |

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