

TITLE	WOKINGHAM LIBRARY CALL-IN RESPONSE
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on 3 May 2017
WARD	Wescott
DIRECTOR	Josie Wragg, Interim Director of Environment

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The relocation of Wokingham Library to the Carnival Pool site will provide the Library Service with greater flexibility and adaptability in its service delivery. Residents will be able to combine visits to the library with a range of other activities. The Carnival Pool site offers better access and parking.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee uphold the decision of the Executive Committee:

1. it be agreed in principle to relocate Wokingham Library to a new building on the Carnival Phase II site;
2. approval to relocate is subject to a full impact assessment and detailed business case being agreed by the Executive Member for Resident Services;
3. the proposal be publicised as soon as practical to enable feedback on these proposals and subsequently the design.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The in principle decision to relocate Wokingham Library has been called-in by five non-executive elected Members. This report provides clarification on the points raised within the call-in.

Background

There is an opportunity for the Council to relocate Wokingham Library to a new site within the Carnival development. The new site will offer greater flexibility for the delivery of library services and provide improved access to other leisure and cultural activities. Opportunities for the redevelopment of the existing library site consistent with the vision for the town centre mean that the move could also deliver a financial benefit for the Council.

The in principle decision to relocate Wokingham Library has been called-in by five non-executive elected Members. Within the call-in, the following four specific grounds relating to the Councils decision making principles have been stated:

1.4.2 Principles of Decision Making

All decisions of the Council will be made in accordance with the following principles:

- a) proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome);
- b) due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers;
- d) a presumption in favour of openness;
- e) clarity of aims and desired outcomes.

Analysis of Issues

Below are the stated reasons for the Call-In and a response to clarify the Councils actions in taking this decision.

Reason 1:

The decision has contravened Section 1.4.2 a) of the Council's constitution, in that the action being proposed is not proportionate to the desired outcome. It is not clear in fact what the motivation for the relocation or the desired outcomes are. Is it to increase library usage? Is it to develop the existing library site to make money?

There is no indication at all as to cost, or to what the success criteria for the project would be in assessing any business case.

Response:

The summary of the Executive Report states:

The new site will offer greater flexibility for the delivery of library services and provide improved access to other leisure and cultural activities.

Within the detail of the Executive Report it states that the proposed library site will provide more useable space for the delivery of library services and provide greater flexibility so the library can adapt to the changing needs of its users. This is consistent with specific elements of the Library Offer that are also presented within the Executive Report:

Access to Services

- *The Library Service will adapt to meet the growing population and changing behaviours of our residents.*
- *The Library Service will utilise opportunities to provide residents with a flexible mix of physical and virtual options for accessing all services*
- *Improve access to other Wokingham Borough Council services in line with Customer Services vision*
- *Strong partnership working to ensure flexibility of delivery and access to library Services*

Visiting and Using Library Buildings

- *The environment within libraries will be welcoming and enjoyable*
- *Buildings will be flexible and adaptable to changing demands for their use*
- *Enable access to other types of services including other council services, health services and local community and voluntary services*
- *They will provide space for locally focused events and activities that develop a sense of community*
- *Actively identify events and services that support the broader Council vision*

The report also highlights the declining usage of the current library site and perceived benefits to library visits of being located next to a destination leisure facility and vastly improved parking.

Overall, visits to Wokingham Borough libraries have been increasing in recent years; however, visits to the main Wokingham Library have reduced slightly over the past three years from 146,448 in 2013/14 to 142,900 visits during 2015/16.

Within the Carnival Phase II site, high levels of footfall are expected along the main pedestrian route giving the library an increased presence in the heart of the development. It would also increase the opportunity for “linked trips”, with visitors to the leisure centre or the other commercial use on the site, also combining this with a visit to the library. The proximity to substantial amounts of public parking close to the library and proximity to public transport will also improve access for visitors.

The proximity to other leisure and cultural activities also presents a positive opportunity to further enhance the usage of library services by children and young people.

The Executive Report states that the costs of Carnival Phase 2 are contained within the MTFP and that an initial assessment of the value of the current library site indicated that the relocation could be self-financing.

At the Executive Meeting on 30th March, the Lead Executive Member for Residents Services clarified this point by stating that the Council would keep its options open on the utilisation of the existing site so as not to limit the possible ways it could deliver a benefit for residents and the Council. All future uses of Council Assets are subject to the same assessments and decision making process to determine their potential value and agree their future use.

Reason 2:

The decision has contravened Section 1.4.2 b) of the Council's constitution, in that due consultation has not occurred. There has been no consultation with library users or the public in general about relocation.

We believe members of the town council and ward members may have been informed in the last few weeks, but required to keep the information confidential. However, they were not consulted.

A consultation on the Library Offer was run in 2016. This consultation did not mention relocation of Wokingham library. Nor did the Executive paper which launched it, in January 2016, make any reference to any need to relocate the library. Consultation conducted in the past on the leisure uses of the Carnival Pool area did not include the possibility of relocation of the library.

Response:

The proposed relocation of Wokingham Library to the Carnival Phase 2 development essentially just moves the existing library service 207 meters into a different building. The core elements of the library service will remain the same.

The Duty to Consult specifies when the Council should consult. The test as to whether local authorities should to consult (in non-statutory cases) is based on whether residents' have a 'legitimate expectation' that consultation would take place.

This is set out by case law and it has been established that legitimate expectation exists in cases where:

- There is a reduction in service
- There is a major change in service
- The local authority has consulted on the issue or similar issues before
- If the local authority has promised to consult.

In summary, no further consultation on the proposed relocation of Wokingham Library was necessary because:

- The proposed relocation of Wokingham Library will not result in any reduction of service for library users.
- The new proposed new location for Wokingham Library is only 207 meters from the existing location, and the core elements of the Library Service won't change.
- The Council consulted extensively on the new Library Offer and Delivery Model in 2016.
- No further commitment to consult was specified within the implementation of the Library Offer.

Detailed responses to questions about consultation were addressed in the Questions to Executive on 30th March 2017.

Reason 3:

The decision has contravened Section 1.4.2 d) of the Council's constitution, in that openness has not been observed. There was no warning whatsoever about the proposal prior to it appearing in the Executive Agenda.

In addition, despite representatives of the Liberal Democrat group having regular meetings with members of the Regeneration team, and discussing all aspects of Wokingham town centre, including what leisure facilities would appear on the Carnival Pool site, no mention has ever been made on relocation of the library.

Members of the town council and Wokingham town borough councillors have also had such meetings. We do not believe this has been raised at those meetings.

Nor has it been mentioned at any of the SDL forums. Nor was it mentioned in the 2016 consultation on the Library Offer.

Nothing has been said in the report about the development potential of the existing site, nor about the finances of the redevelopment of the Carnival Pool area. Nor is the impact on the Denmark Street car park discussed in the report.

Response:

The proposed relocation of Wokingham Library was added to the Executive Forward Programme in accordance with the requirements contained within the Council's Constitution.

A confidential briefing was circulated to local ward members in the broader Wokingham Town area on 22nd February 2017. The briefing was also circulated to Wokingham Town Councillors.

The briefing included details of how to obtain more detailed information about the proposed relocation.

Details of the Library Offer consultation have been covered above.

At the Executive meeting on the 30th March 2017, the Lead Executive Member for Residents Services and the Lead Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance provided further information on the potential uses for the existing site, the Carnival Phase 2 development and the Denmark Street Car Par.

Reason 4:

The decision has contravened Section 1.4.2 e) of the Council's constitution, in that clarity of aims and desired outcomes has not been achieved. There is no evidence provided to justify the sudden decision to move the library.

Money has only recently been invested in the existing building. There is criticism in the report of the fact that the existing library is "on the outer edge of the town centre" – yet the proposed location is further from the town centre.

The report talks about the space within the library, and compares the 1324 m2 of which 841 m2 currently available for books, with the 1000 m2 potentially available at Carnival Pool. It makes reference to the existing café taking up space, but not to alternate uses for that space, nor to exactly how big a café might be provided at Carnival Pool; it also mentions the 180 m2 used by Elevate – but does not explain what will happen to Elevate if the library is relocated. It talks about larger events being able to be held in a bigger undivided space – but does not take into account the fact that book shelves, counters etc. will occupy the majority of the space, making it unusable in that way.

Response:

The June 2016 Executive Report included a section on the implementation of the Library Offer and named the libraries where this would have the most benefit. This included Wokingham Library.

The proposal is to relocate the library in 2021. The in principle decision has been sought now to provide enough time to go through the planning application, Compulsory Purchase Order and build processes that will be necessary for Carnival Phase 2.

At the Executive Meeting it was clarified that the majority of the £47,000 of investment in Wokingham Library would be moved with the library to its proposed new location in four years' time.

At the Executive Meeting it was also clarified that the new location would be more prominent in the redeveloped Elms Field area.

The Executive Report is clear in the ambition to create more flexible space within the library, meaning that the some elements of the library can adapt over time to meet changes in demand. At the Executive Meeting it was clarified that the detailed specification for the new Carnival Phase 2 development had not yet been agreed, but that there would be a series of engagement events for people to input into this process.

The bookshelves will be on wheels so that they are easily movable and the library counter will be located so that usable space can be created within the library.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

The capital costs of building the new library space are factored into the existing Medium Term Financial Plan allocation for the Carnival Pool Phase II scheme.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

The opportunity to relocate the library to the Carnival Phase II site enables the co-location of Council services in one location, delivering service and cost efficiencies and a positive customer experience.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

Executive Reports – Library Offer (June 2016), Relocation of Wokingham Library (March 2017), Questions to the Executive EM1, EM2, EM3, EM4, EP3, EP4 (March 2017)

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