

MINUTES OF MEETING CABINET HELD ON Tuesday, 20th June, 2017 6.30pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Claire Kober (Chair), Peray Ahmet, Eugene Ayisi, Ali Demirci, Joe Ejiofor, Joe Goldberg, Alan Strickland and Elin Weston

ALSO ATTENDING: Councillors: Carter, Newton, M Blake, Connor

10. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/QUESTIONS

The Leader advised the meeting that two deputations had been received in relation to item 12 on the agenda, proposed relocation of Highgate Library service.

Deputation 1 -Save Highgate Library

The first deputation was from the Save Highgate Library Group, and the Leader invited the group's deputation spokesperson, Natasha Sivanandan to put forward the group's representations.

The group was in opposition to the relocation of Highgate Library service and to the potential future disposal of the site. They referred to the gathering local concern about the future of Highgate Library, reflected in a petition that had collected over 2000 signatures in a three-week period.

Ms Sivanandan spoke about the benefits of the Highgate Library for the community and attributed reduced attendance to the closure of the Library on Saturdays. It was further contended that adding a Library service to a multiple use arts centre would not work well and there was no obligation on Jacksons Lane to provide a Library on site.

The group questioned the public engagement being led by the architect as they felt this constituted a conflict of interest. They questioned why a Council led public consultation had not been held before an in principle decision was being put forward to Cabinet.

It was felt that taking an in principle decision to relocate the Library and dispose of the Highgate Library building was premature and would be difficult to deescalate once taken, and would also not allow consideration in future to opposing views.

The group called on the Cabinet to consider the unique aspects of Highgate Library, the important role of libraries in the community and asked Cabinet not to ignore the views of local people. They asked that no in principle decisions are taken before a public consultation exercise.

The Leader thanked the deputation party and responded to the representations.

The Leader began by highlighting the cuts imposed on Councils over the last 7 years which had resulted in a 40% reduction in Council budgets and meant the Council had had to re-assess how it delivered services. The Council had always been committed to a universal public service offer and Libraries were at the core of this offer as a place to learn and socialise. The Cabinet report highlighted the care given to Library provision and the fact that no Libraries had closed in the past 7 years was evident of this commitment.

However, it was important for the Council to give regard to the falling numbers of Library visitors, across the country and the new and emerging priorities for local people, also ensuring that Libraries were fit for purpose in the 21st century.

The Leader further emphasised that the arrangement being sought with Jacksons Lane Arts Centre was co-location of the Library and not a merger. A feasibility study was being conducted to ensure that there was dedicated space for the Library that is accessible and allows quite study and social activities. The feasibility study was being conducted with an open mind, expected to complete by the end of July/ early August. An in principal decision was being sought to provide the Arts Council some certainty that co-location was being explored, to aid JLAC's capital funding bid.

The Leader was clear that if the feasibility study did not find the co location suitable, it would not be taken forward and the £1m capital funding found elsewhere by the Council to support Jackson's Lane Art Centre bid.

Deputation 2- Highgate Library Action Group

The Leader invited Sue Chinn to put forward the representations of the Highgate Library Action Group.

- The Group felt that the decisions being taken by Cabinet were premature before a feasibility study was completed and asked that the report be withdrawn.
- The Group commended the petition that was being collated by the Save the Highgate Library Group which had encouraged more users to the Library.
- The Group were unhappy with the report mentioning the disposal of the Library before a feasibility study had been completed. They felt that this undermined the process and was pre determination . This also resulted in a lack of future security for the Highgate Library service with these decisions on record .
- The Deputation contended that a co-location exercise would still need involve engagement with HLAG and Jacksons Lane Art Centre Group before an agreement was reached therefore an in principle decision should not be taken. HLAG further questioned what would happen to the Library if the Jacksons Lane site was sold.
- The Deputation also felt that the public did not trust the process, as although the Council were not disposing of the building, at the present time, the recommendations gave them the option of doing this at a later date.

- The Group further questioned the future of Highgate Library with the decisions being put forward and the precedence of these decisions for other small libraries that may have disability access issues.

The Leader thanked the deputation and recognised the Highgate Library Action Group had dedicated a lot of time energy along to supporting the Library over the years.

The Leader reiterated that, if the scheme to relocate the existing Highgate Library service to Jacksons Lane Arts Centre proves not to be feasible, the Council will not dispose of the existing Library site and will find the £1m capital match funding for Jackson's Lane elsewhere. If the feasibility study was positive, on the co-location, then the Library service would need to fully relocate before the existing site is disposed of.

12. PROPOSED RELOCATION OF HIGHGATE LIBRARY SERVICE

The Leader introduced the report which was seeking an in principle agreement from Members to the relocation of Highgate Library, to Jacksons Lane Arts Centre and was further seeking an in principle agreement to the disposal of the freehold of the existing Highgate Library site following a successful relocation of the library which would be through the Highgate Library Service Relocation Project ("the Scheme").

In response to Councillor Carter's questions the following information was noted:

- That an in principle decision was being sought on disposal before the feasibility study was completed, to provide comfort to the Arts Council, of the Council match funding the capital funding bid from Jackson's Lane Arts Centre.
- Assurance that the community in Highgate will continue to have a Library service fit for purpose in the 21 century.
- That there would be a future consultation on the relocation of the Library and Highgate library offer, subject to a positive feasibility study.
- Jacksons Lane Arts Centre can acquire their building lease as any other community organisation in the borough can do. A Community Asset Transfer Policy for community buildings which sets out terms for transfer to a private or community organisation would be due for decision at July Cabinet.

RESOLVED

1. To agree in principle to the Scheme to relocate from the existing Highgate Library service (shown edged red on the plan at Appendix B) to Jacksons Lane Arts Centre (shown edged red on the plan at Appendix A) subject to a feasibility study to be approved at a later meeting of Cabinet, but in considering this recommendation, Members are referred to the legal comments of the Assistant Director of Corporate Governance at paragraph 8.2 in the attached report.

2. To agree that the Highgate Library site (as shown edged red on the plan at Appendix B) be reviewed on the basis that it is surplus to requirements and that the freehold interest can be disposed of, subject to the existing Highgate Library service being able to relocate to the JLAC and to submit a further report to Cabinet with the proposed terms for the disposal of the site for approval;
3. To agree that costs associated with necessary condition works to JLAC and all costs associated with relocating the library service to JLAC (including fit out and fees) will be funded by the capital programme but to the maximum total amount of the capital receipt obtained from the disposal of the existing Highgate Library site (valuation letter for the disposal can be found at Appendix C, which is the Part B Exempt Report) and the new Library service will continue to be managed by the Council. The Council's contribution will include £1m of match funding, which will be alongside Arts Council funding and JLAC other funding sources. The total funding contribution from the Council will be part of a later report presented to Cabinet;
4. To agree to the inclusion of a new scheme (Jackson Lane Arts Centre Enhancement & Highgate Library Service Relocation project) within the approved capital programme.

Reasons for Decision

The opportunity to relocate the existing library service in Highgate to JLAC has been presented to the Council and has the potential to significantly improve the current offer to the community by improving the library environment and technology available and also presenting a more coherent approach to the wider community offer in the area.

There is currently very limited funding for improvements to the existing Highgate Library service. The relocation of the library service will make capital available to support an enhanced library space on the JLAC site and complement the Arts Council funding which is being sought to support refurbishment and condition works at JLAC.

The JLAC is a Grade 2 listed former church building for which the Council has freehold ownership. The lease to the JLAC expired on the 11th August 2013 and they are holding over on the lease and have a right of renewal under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. The building is in a poor state of repair with a number of condition issues and a backlog of repairs and maintenance. The Arts Council funding therefore provides the opportunity for capital to be available to prioritise these condition works to be completed at the earliest opportunity.

A timely decision on this opportunity is required in order for the library service relocation to be included in a variation to the existing Arts Council funding bid.

Alternative options considered

Do nothing: If the Council chooses to not progress this opportunity it will only make minor improvements to the library services in Highgate. There will not be the same partnership opportunities with JLAC to provide a more collaborative approach to the

arts and cultural offer within the local area. In addition to this without the match funding to the Arts Council bid, the JLAC building does not have an opportunity to become more accessible, efficient and sustainable, nor does it have the capacity for growing audiences and intensifying use. The lack of condition works could make some areas of the building increasingly unusable and therefore the Council as Landlord would need to address these concerns, but without adequate budget for medium or long term improvements.

The appraisals include recommendations for revisions to the Conservation Area boundaries as per the statutory duty under Section 69 of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990). The Council must ensure that designated conservation areas are of sufficient special architectural or historic interest to warrant designation, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 127) and Historic England guidelines.

23. PROPOSED RELOCATION OF HIGHGATE LIBRARY SERVICE

As per item 12