

<b>Report to</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>23 January 2024</b>
<b>Chair of Scrutiny</b>	<b>Councillor Huw O Williams, Chair of Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Head of Service</b>	<b>Catrin Roberts, Head of Corporate Support Service: People</b>
<b>Report author</b>	<b>Rhian Evans, Scrutiny Co-ordinator</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Outcome of Communities Scrutiny Committee's Review of Cabinet's Decision relating to the Library/One Stop Shop Savings Proposal</b>

## **1. What is the report about?**

- 1.1. The conclusions reached by Communities Scrutiny Committee following its review of Cabinet's decision of the 19 December 2023 relating to the 'Library/One Stop Shop Savings Proposal'.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1. To present Cabinet with the conclusions and recommendations following Communities Scrutiny Committee's review of the Cabinet decision relating to the 'Library/One Stop Shop Savings Proposal'.
- 2.2 To seek Cabinet to review its original decision taking into account Scrutiny's conclusions and recommendations.

### 3. What are the Recommendations?

That Cabinet:

- 3.1 acknowledges Communities Scrutiny Committee's observations, conclusions and recommendations following its review of the Cabinet decision relating to the 'Library/One Stop Shop Savings Proposal'; and
- 3.2 agrees to the Committee's recommendation to postpone the implementation of the decision until further exploratory work is done to identify alternative funding sources available to the Council or other partner bodies whether in the private or public sector.

### 4. Report details

- 4.1 On 19 December 2023 Cabinet considered a report on 'Library/One Stop Shop Savings Proposal'. At the conclusion of its discussion Cabinet's decision was to:
  - (a) *note the report and approve the proposal to reduce Library/One Stop Shop opening hours by c.40%, together with associated savings in other parts of the service, to release an expected saving of £360K, and*
  - (b) *confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 1) as part of its consideration."*
- 4.2 The Council's 'call-in' procedure defines a process for Scrutiny to exercise its statutory powers to review or scrutinise executive decisions, and to request that the decision-maker reconsiders a decision that has been taken, prior to it being implemented.
- 4.3 The Cabinet's decision was published on the Council's website on 21 December 2023. Between the 29 December 2023 and 2 January 2024, 'Notice of Call-In' e-mails by the required number of non-Cabinet councillors were received in respect of the above decision. This was within the 5 working day timescale stipulated in the Council's 'Call-in Procedure Rules'. The grounds for the Call-in can be seen in Annex 1 attached.
- 4.4 The Council's 'call-in' procedure stipulates that a special meeting of a scrutiny committee should be convened within 5 working days of receipt of the Notice of

Call-In of Decision unless a scrutiny committee has a scheduled meeting within that period. The procedure also states that this timeline can be extended if both the decision-maker and the Chair of the scrutiny committee agree to an extension. As there were no meetings of any of the Council's Scrutiny Committees scheduled within the prescribed timescale an extension to the timeline was agreed between the decision-maker and the Chair of the Communities Scrutiny Committee to facilitate the convening of a Special Meeting for the purpose of discussing the decision called-in for scrutiny. This Special Meeting was held on 11 January 2024. A copy of the [report](#) and appendices presented to the Committee are available on the Council's website (agenda item 4). The Committee's [debate](#) on the above can also be viewed on the Council's website.

4.5 An extensive discussion took place at the meeting on the matters outlined in the 'Call-in of Decision Notice' (see Annex 1), with particular reference being made to the high number of responses received to the public consultation.

4.6 The Committee had particular concerns with respect of the potential impact the reduction in opening hours would have on the availability:

- and accessibility of library and one stop shop services to residents, particularly the most vulnerable and digitally excluded citizens in the county.
- of library facilities for use as 'warm spaces' for those most adversely affected by the cost-of-living crisis, those experiencing social isolation, as well as individuals living with long-term health issues and their carers.
- of library facilities for children and young people to use for study or research work, or as safe havens away from chaotic personal or family situations.
- of libraries for use by community groups/voluntary organisations to hold well-being events/support groups, or for business organisations to deliver valuable advice services to residents.

4.7 In addition to the above, the Committee was also concerned about the decision's anticipated adverse affect on staff morale and the impact the potential loss of experienced staff would have on the Service's future capacity

to deliver high quality services. Committee members also had concerns on the potential unintended negative consequences the decision may have on other Council services which are already experiencing severe pressures i.e., education and children/adult social care services.

4.8 At the conclusion of its discussion the Committee resolved to refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration. The basis of the referral is that the Committee felt that, prior to Cabinet taking the decision to reduce the Library/One Stop Shop opening hours, not enough investigations had been made with outside bodies or external organisations in a bid to secure other funding or resources to help maintain current service levels. Consequently, in determining to seek Cabinet to reconsider its original decision the Committee recommends that Cabinet postpones the implementation of the original decision in order to facilitate exploratory work to be undertaken with private, public and voluntary organisations with a view to securing potential alternative funding sources to help sustain and potentially enhance service provision for the future.

## **5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?**

5.1. See Section 5 of the Cabinet report dated 19 December 2023.

## **6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?**

6.1. See Section 6 of the Cabinet report dated 19 December 2023.

6.2. Please see the Chief Finance Officer's Statement, Section 9 below regarding the potential costs associated with endorsing Scrutiny's recommendations.

## **7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?**

7.1. See Section 7 of the Cabinet report 19 December 2023.

## **8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?**

8.1 This report presents the conclusions of the Scrutiny process and the recommendations arising from it.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

9.1 The Cabinet report dated 19<sup>th</sup> December 2023 states that the proposal will release an expected annual recurring saving of £360k. These savings have been included in proposals to set a balanced budget for 2024/25 (included elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda). In reaching its decision Cabinet should consider the impact on the 2024/25 budget. To postpone is likely to result in this level of savings not being met, meaning that an equivalent alternative level of savings needs to be found, Council Tax is increased further, or reserves are drawn down.

## **10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**

10.1. The endorsement of Scrutiny's recommendations in relation to the original Cabinet decision should mitigate the risk to the Council of adverse community reaction and/or negative media coverage in relation to this savings proposal.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

11.1. Sections 21(2) and (3) of the Local Government Act 2000; and

11.2 Section 7.4.2(a) of the Council's Constitution stipulates that "Scrutiny Committee may review and scrutinise the decisions...of the Cabinet" whilst Section 7.4.2(d) states that they may "make recommendations to the Cabinet...arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process."