

SCRUTINY REPORT



MEETING: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 24th MARCH 2015

SUBJECT: PETITION REVIEW

REPORT FROM: Leigh Webb – Principal Democratic Services Officer

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Bury Council received a petition on 15th December containing the following wording:
- 1.2 " Bury Council is trying to close Butterstile, Toodle Hill, Daisyfield, High Meadow, Moorside, Stepping Stones and Ramsbottom Children's Centres. We the undersigned implore the Council to keep these crucial centres open. Children's Centres are lifelines for so many. The plans will cut children's centres from the most deprived areas. This will therefore hit the most vulnerable. The plans state the development of a "hub" service, i.e. a few centralised centres of activity which will be inaccessible to most without a car. More families, mums, dads and children will be far more isolated leading to less contact with vital links to family wellbeing. This can only lead to a deterioration in the health and wellbeing of under 5's and their families."
- 1.3 As the petition contained in excess of 2,500 signatures from people who live, work or study in Bury, it was referred to the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People who decided to refer the petition for consideration at the meeting of Council held on 28th January 2015

2.0 ISSUES

- 2.1 The above petition is before the Committee following a request from the organiser for a review of the way the Petition has been dealt with by the Council. This right of review is set out in the current Petitions Procedure which is appended to this report.
- 2.2 The Petition organisers' dissatisfaction with the way the Petition was dealt with relates to the fact that, in considering the matter at Full Council on 28th January 2015, no debate was permitted to take place.
- 2.3 The right to have the matter debated was set out in the Council's Petitions procedure which was in place at the time of the Petition being instigated in late August 2014. However during the period between the petition being started

and it being submitted on 15th December, Bury's Petitions Procedure had been reviewed and amended. As such, the petition was dealt with under the new arrangements which stipulate that a petition containing 2500 will be submitted to Full Council with the petition organiser given 5 minutes to present. The new procedures require Council to agree a response to the petition and if there is no agreement then the appropriate Cabinet Member will be invited to respond by way of a recommended course of action; which will then be seconded and put to the vote without debate.

- 2.4 The Council's petition procedure was reviewed by the Council's Democratic Arrangements Forum in November 2014 and subsequently amended on December 11th 2014.
- 2.5 The review of the procedures was prompted by a previous petition submitted in September concerning refuse collection, where debate did not take place as the petition organiser failed to turn up to the meeting. The new arrangements sought to address this eventuality.
- 2.6 Furthermore, this presented an opportunity for Members to consider the general requirement for a petitions scheme as the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 had since been repealed through the Localism Act 2011 and the Council is no longer required by law to have a Petition Scheme or an e-petitions facility.
- 2.7 The decision with regard to "Alternative Services: Under 5's" was taken by Cabinet on 21 January 2015 and the report before Members contained reference to the on-line petition.
- 2.8 Copies of relevant documents and correspondence, in chronological order, are appended to this report to assist Members in deciding on a course of action.

3.0 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 Members are requested to determine the outcome of the Petition Review in accordance with Section 6 of the current petitions procedure

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Petitions Scheme (pre 11.12.14)
- Appendix 2 - Democratic Arrangements Forum – Minutes 4 November 2014
- Appendix 3 - Delegated Decision Form
- Appendix 4 - Current Petitions Scheme
- Appendix 5 - Acknowledgement Letter
- Appendix 6 - Summary of email correspondence

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