

Newtongrange Community Facilities

Report by Hillary Kelly, Head of Customer Services

1 Purpose of Report

To highlight issues in relation to the above petition and to seek the Committee's instructions.

2 Petition

- 2.1** The attached petition (**Appendix 1**) has been received from Mr Paddy Carstairs, 18 Lothian Terrace, Newtongrange, concerning the future maintenance and upkeep of community facilities in Newtongrange, i.e. Newbattle Pool; Newtongrange Library; Newtongrange Leisure Centre; and Newbattle Community Learning Centre, in the event that the Council decides, following the consultation process on the new Newbattle High School, that these facilities should remain open.

3 Petitions – Rules and Procedures

- 3.1** In accordance with the decision of the Council on 25 September 2012 when the Petitions Committee was established, it was agreed that:-

- (a) the Head of Customer Services would have responsibility for validating petitions; and
- (b) that the Petitions Committee would have the final decision on those which were deemed by the Head of Customer Services to be invalid, etc.

- 3.2** The procedures for the Midlothian Council Petitions Committee are modelled on those in use at Renfrewshire Council. The adopted Midlothian procedures identify 11 categories for which petitions cannot be made. This includes:-

- Subject matters which have been considered by the Council in the preceding 12 months.

- 3.3** The Petition is in the following terms, viz:-

“This petition demands Midlothian Council shows its commitment to the community facilities in Newtongrange that have been considered for closure in the second stage consultation on the new Newbattle High School, namely Newbattle Swimming Pool, Newtongrange Leisure Centre, Newbattle Community Learning Centre and Newtongrange Library. In particular the Council is called on to:

- a) keep these facilities under Council ownership and management;*

b) plan and implement a regular repair and maintenance programme that includes resolving any backlog of repairs to prolong the life of each facility.

When the second stage consultation on the new Newbattle High School commenced, many people were alarmed and angry that the closure of eight local facilities in Gorebridge, Mayfield and Newtongrange was being proposed. The Council published information and ratings about the running costs, condition and fitness for purpose of each facility, with consideration being limited to financial cost. When this information was challenged by members of the public, it was quickly revised by Council officials, with the ratings for condition and fitness for purpose showing sudden improvement, and maintenance costs reduced.

Social and environmental costs did not feature in the consultation document, nor was there any qualitative impact assessment.

At public meetings in each village community, vociferous opposition has been expressed against the proposed closures, and thousands of signatures were gathered in petitions against the closure of each of the local facilities in Newtongrange. People want their services to stay in the village and expressed horror at the social and environmental consequences of their closure and relocation in the new school.

Since then, both the SNP and Labour parties have issued official public statements confirming that neither party will vote to close any local facility when the matter is considered at the Council meeting on 25 June. However, no assurance has been given that the local facilities will continue to receive from the Council the investment required to prolong their lives, and there is a growing fear that the Council intends to proceed with a strategy that results in the closure of our local facilities.

Scenario Four is not a legitimate option. No community group has expressed any readiness or willingness to manage our facilities. Our services must remain under Council control with proper investment and maintenance for the future.”

- 3.4** Within the parameters laid down by the Council for me to validate petitions, I have concluded that although part of the subject of the petition could be deemed the same or similar to a petition already considered by the Committee, there are other parts to this petition which have not been considered. The petition does not fail any of the other criteria tests and is therefore deemed to be valid for that reason.

4 Report Implications

4.1 Resource

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report. In the event that the Committee agree to support the petition, the revenue implications of that decision would require to be quantified to allow the recommendation to be considered.

4.2 Risk

There are no risk implications arising from this report.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☐ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☐ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☐ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☒ None of the above

4.4 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

Not applicable.

4.5 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Not applicable.

4.6 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

The availability of a Petitions Committee allows stakeholders to raise issues for consideration by the Council.

4.7 Ensuring Equalities

Not applicable.

4.8 Supporting Sustainable Development

Not applicable.

4.9 IT Issues

Not applicable.

5 Recommendation

The Committee is invited to consider the petition submitted in respect of Newtongrange Community Facilities.

17 June 2013

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