1. SUMMARY

1.1. A petition has been received containing 5,365 signatures. On 21st October 2010, the Council adopted a Scheme for how petitions will be dealt with, which provided that paper petitions that are signed by 4,000 or more signatories (8,000 signatories in the case of e-petitions) will be debated at a meeting of the full Council.

1.2. The Petitions Scheme provides that the petition organiser or a representative will be permitted to address the Council for three minutes prior to the Council debate. Because of the importance of this issue for the borough, the Leader has recommended that 5 minutes be allocated for a speaker.

2. RECOMMENDATION

2.1. As the subject of the petition is an issue on which the Cabinet is required to make the final decision, Councillors may either:

(a) make comments or recommendations to Cabinet, or

(b) note the petition and take no further action

(Note: The Leader of the Council will move an appropriate motion to initiate the Council debate; the motion for debate will be included in the Council Order Paper).

3. DETAILS OF THE PETITION

3.1. The petition was presented to the Mayor on 29th September 2011, by members of the ‘Save Harrow Green Library! Campaign’.

3.2. The wording of the petition is as follows:

“We, the undersigned, protest at the proposed closure of Harrow Green library and urge the Council to reconsider the proposal”

(Note: on several pages the word “withdraw” is used instead of “reconsider”. The Head of Legal & Democratic Services has
advised that, although there are some slight differences in the wording of the statement on different sheets of the petition, the intent and purpose of all sheets are consistent and it should be treated as a single petition.)

3.3 The petition organisers have commented as follows in a covering letter:

“The petition is presented on behalf of the community of Leytonstone in the south of the borough.

It represents residents and users of the library who wish to see it remain open and in full functioning for all residents, whether they are very young, of school age or adults.

Leytonstone has been considered by all of the reports as a deprived area. The library serves Cathall and Cann Hall wards in particular – areas with very high multiple deprivation indices. The area must be considered in need of investment and support by council services. This library provides support and education without discrimination. The signatories are unanimous in wishing to see this important facility remain. It is one of the very few remaining public facilities in this deprived area.”

3.4 A covering Statement is also attached (Appendix 1).

4. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4.1 In March 2011, Council agreed to reduce expenditure on the Library and Information Service by £1 million over two years as part of the schedule of savings identified for 2011/12 and 2012/13 in the annual Budget and Council Tax Setting report.

4.2 A review of the Library and Information Service was subsequently undertaken to identify proposals to deliver this savings target while ensuring that the service continues to improve and meet local needs.

4.3 The review proposed the following vision for the Library and Information Service:

Waltham Forest’s Library and Information Service will offer a modern and comprehensive network of libraries with a high quality library stock, free internet, excellent customer care and access to a range of Council services. The Library and Information Service will encourage local people to use and get involved in their libraries and make sure that all services provide value for money.

4.4 To deliver this vision, the strategic review outlined five key objectives for the service:

i) Waltham Forest will run a comprehensive network of high quality libraries that meet the needs of our residents and those who work and study in the borough.

ii) We will ensure that users have access to high quality library stock and resources designed to meet the needs of our residents.
iii) Libraries will provide excellent customer service to all library users across the full range of library and information services and wider Council services.

iv) We will encourage members of the community to become involved with designing services in their local libraries and will work with them to promote the use of our libraries.

v) We will provide a high quality Library and Information Service, which provides excellent value for money for local taxpayers, making the best use of all available resources.

4.5 To achieve these objectives, the strategic review proposes reconfiguring the Library and Information Service around three neighbourhoods (the north, centre and south) and developing a service model that distinguishes between two different types of library:

- Library Plus: branches that are open seven days a week, deliver the core library offer and provide access to a range of wider Council services; and
- Library Local: branches that are open for 30 hours a week, deliver the core library offer and are tailored to the needs of the local community.

4.6 The core library offer, to be delivered by both Library Plus and Library Local branches, is as follows:

- relevant and up to date information and books in a range of formats;
- free internet access;
- a range of learning opportunities;
- a wide choice of local services reflecting local needs; and
- excellent customer service delivered by knowledgeable staff.

4.7 In addition, Library Plus branches will also:

- provide access to an enhanced Library and Information Service with better resources;
- open for seven days a week; and
- offer access to other Council services and services delivered by external partners.

4.8 Finally, the strategic review proposed a key service standard: that all residents should live within 1.5 miles of their nearest library and 2 miles of their nearest Library Plus.

4.9 The development plan set out proposals for implementing the strategic review in practice. Using a series of selection criteria, it identified how the library service model should be implemented in each of the three neighbourhoods and recommended the following approach:
- The north: North Chingford library should be designated as a Library Plus, Hale End library should be designated as a Library Local, and South Chingford library should close.

- The centre: Walthamstow library should be designated as a Library Plus, and Higham Hill and Wood Street libraries should be designated as Library Locals.

- The south: Leyton and Leytonstone libraries should be designated as Library Pluses, Lea Bridge library should be designated as a Library Local, and Harrow Green library should close.

5. CONSULTATION AND PROPOSALS TO BE CONSIDERED BY CABINET AT ITS MEETING ON 11TH OCTOBER 2011

5.1 In June 2011, Cabinet agreed to undertake public consultation on the proposals. The outcome of the public consultation will be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 11th October, but Cabinet is being advised that to allow full consideration of this petition, no decision at the Cabinet meeting will be final or implemented until after the Council meeting on 20 October, when the petition will be considered. Also, that:

a. if Council resolves to make recommendations on the closure of Harrow Green library to Cabinet, no decision will be implemented or be final until Cabinet has considered those recommendations at another meeting; or

b. if Council does not make any recommendations on the closure of Harrow Green library to Cabinet, any Cabinet decisions made will become final and will be implemented without need for any further decision.

5.2 Full details of the responses to the public consultation are set out in the report to the Cabinet meeting, which can be seen on the Council’s website at:


5.3 Any decisions taken at the Cabinet meeting on 11th October will be set out in the Order Paper for the Council meeting. However, the recommendations being made to Cabinet on 11th October are as follows:

To agree a development plan for the Libraries and Information Service, including proposals to:

(a) designate North Chingford, Walthamstow, Leyton and Leytonstone libraries as Library Plus branches, which will be open for seven days a week;

(b) designate Hale End, Higham Hill, Wood Street and Lea Bridge libraries as Library Local branches, which will be open for 30 hours a week;
(c) close South Chingford and Harrow Green libraries;

(d) work with interested parties to progress the establishment of a community-run library in South Chingford, on the condition that any such library would be broadly cost neutral to the Council;

(e) undertake a public consultation exercise to inform the distribution of the 30 opening hours allocated to each Library Local; and

(f) review the opening hours of all Library Pluses and Library Locals in June 2012 to assess how effectively and efficiently they are meeting local need in practice

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

6.1.1 The proposals being considered by Cabinet on 11th October will deliver the required full-year effect savings target of £1million.

6.1.2 If Cabinet does not agree to implement the proposals, the Library and Information Service will need to develop alternative proposals to achieve the £1million savings target. Alternatively, the service could remain unchanged and the budget would remain at its present level. However, savings of £1million would need to be identified from elsewhere within the Council since the Medium Term Financial Strategy is predicated on delivery of this saving.

6.1.3 The development plan includes a number of proposals to ensure the Library and Information Service delivers better value for money. These include smarter procurement of stock and services and greater use of self-service technology.

6.2 Legal

6.2.1 Libraries provision is an issue which by law the Cabinet is required to make a final decision, within the budget and any policy framework determined by the Full council.

6.2.2 Consequently the Council may make recommendations to Cabinet for it to consider.

6.3 Equalities and Diversity

6.3.1 The report to the Cabinet meeting sets out the requirement for the Council to have regard to its public sector equality duty (PSED) under s.149 of the Equalities Act. An equality analysis has been undertaken and the key impacts on people with protected characteristics are set out in detail in the report to Cabinet.

6.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

6.4.1 The implications are set out in the report to the Cabinet meeting.
6.5 Council Infrastructure

6.5.1 The implications are set out in the report to the Cabinet meeting, including the comments of the Trade Unions on the staffing issues associated with the proposals.

APPENDICES:
Save Harrow Green Library! Campaign Petition Statement

BACKGROUND INFORMATION (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

Petition Scheme (Published)
Cabinet Agenda 11th October 2011 (published)