

275 - WRITTEN QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

A petition was presented by Councillor Johnson regarding the closure of the public toilets in the Market Hall, Market Harborough. Councillor Johnson reported that the petition contained 3,514 signatories from residents in Market Harborough and from 36 other areas, including a significant number from Northamptonshire. The main reasons behind the petition were:-

- There had been no footfall surveys undertaken
- The closure was an affront to dignity and commonsense
- Councillors were responsible for working with the people they represented and this petition was representative of the views of the people affected.
- The Leader had refused to listen to those people who would be particularly affected by the closure.
- St. Mary's place was the flagship shopping area of the town to which people gravitated and this area would now be without a public convenience.
- There was a thriving market hall cafe with now no nearby toilet facilities as was the situation with the bus station
- Tight bus schedules would not allow people time to get to the Commons Car park toilet.
- It would involve people, including disabled, crossing busy roads to Commons Car Park toilet.
- 3,500 signatures cannot be wrong and closure was a backwards step.

In response, Councillor Spendlove-Mason, Portfolio Holder, apologised to those residents most affected by the closure, however he emphasised that the Council had a responsibility to set a balanced budget to discharge its responsibilities. He explained that a year ago, the Council had to reduce its revenue costs and a list of activities was presented to the Executive. The provision of public conveniences was not a statutory provision and the total cost to the Council of keeping all the toilets open was £120,000 per year. After much debate, the Executive had made the decision to close four of those and save £50,000 and therefore a balanced budget had been achieved without having to close all of the toilets or put jobs at risk.

Furthermore, the impact of further cuts from the Revenue Fund to be announced by the new coalition Government was as yet unknown and whilst acknowledging the efforts that had been made previously by the opposition party, he suggested that they might like to come up with ideas/suggestions for further savings to reduce further revenue demands on the council.

Councillor Rook added that this was the second petition that had been received in respect of this matter and after it was presented previously, he had promised that he would take it back to Executive to re-examine and this had been done. The Council had been placed in a position where it had to make cuts and even greater financial pressures would be placed on the Council within the next few months. The opposition party would be involved in working on a choice based budget. He accepted that 3,500 signatures was a significant amount but this did not change the situation the Council faced as the savings were still desperately needed. However, he confirmed that if the opposition party came up with some alternative solutions with robust cases, he would ask the Executive to look at the issue again.

A motion was proposed by Councillor Pain and seconded by Councillor Dunton that a complete review of the District's Public Conveniences be undertaken in the light of the proposals contained within the Core Spatial Strategy with reference to the economic vitality of the District's public conveniences. The review should include the current usage, the likely usage in the future, the quality and condition of those public conveniences and whether they are in the most appropriate locations and the cost. In the meantime, the Market Hall toilets would remain closed.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was carried.