

# Brighton & Hove City Council

## Equalities, Community Safety, and Human Rights Committee

## Agenda Item 16

**Subject:** Items Referred from Full Council (20 July 2023)

**Date of meeting:** 13 October 2023

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of deputations from members of the public.

The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

**(1) Deputation concerning the closure of Mile Oak Library**  
*Supported by:*

Victoria Smith  
David Allan  
Penny Gilbey  
Nicola Gonzalez-Swan  
Liz Hodder  
Alan Muir  
Sarah Pain  
Emily Smith

We are asking that this meeting suspends the closure of Mile Oak Library and the removal of its £35, 000 costs from the Libraries budget whilst a greater effort is made to remove barriers to the local community's access to this service, to increase attendance and to find a more suitable venue for the library and its role as Mile Oak's last remaining community hub.

The decision to close the library was made without proper consultation with local community groups and organisations on probable impact, and without a user survey to find out why use had declined so dramatically. Proper efforts to reverse this decline were not made, including basics such as good signage and an examination of the effect of the greater difficulty entering the building post-COVID. A user survey was put out by Library services after the decision to close the library was made and its findings were not used to increase attendance.

Local people have cited the increased difficulty in entering the building, its obscurity (many didn't realize it was there or thought it was PACA's library) and opening hours; as well as frequent unexpected closures within library hours, unheard buzzers and lack of lighting as playing a significant role in reducing or preventing them from visiting. This runs against the Service Level Agreement put in place in 2016 between PACA and Brighton and Hove Council when the old library was demolished to make way for the new school building.

Community libraries naturally cost more per visit to run, and whilst visitor numbers have fallen to such an extent that such costs are unusually high this can be changed. Mile Oak is a community with significant levels of

deprivation which has lost the majority of services provided by its Childrens Centre and has no other community space for children and families, older people, those with disabilities, carers or other disadvantaged groups. The closure will impact most on these people, and its current inaccessibility is already impacting on them. The closure of Mile Oak Library removes the last free accessible space in the community, a space that needs to work harder and across council services. Once the library funding is lost to the community we know we will not regain it, whatever alternative venues are found.

**Supporting Information:**

