

## Brighton & Hove City Council

### Overview & Scrutiny

### Agenda Item 25 (C)

#### **Subject: Public Involvement**

**Date of meeting: 10/11/25**

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each Committee meeting for the hearing of Deputations from members of the public. Each deputation may be heard for a maximum of five minutes following the chair will respond. It shall then be moved by the chair and voted on without discussion that the spokesperson for the deputation be thanked for attending and its subject matter noted.

Notification that three deputations have been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

#### **(1) Deputation concerning Rottingdean Library**

##### **Supported by:**

Sarah Craven-Antill  
Dilys Brown  
Nicky Lloyd-Owen  
Caroline Ellis  
Liz Broadley  
Clare Hayes

##### **Summary of deputation:**

Our campaign has raised serious concerns about the process and approach for the proposals to close three Brighton and Hove libraries.

We believe the decision fails to meet the DCMS requirements, but in any case we think the committee should ask serious questions about the way in which this has been pushed through Brighton and Hove's decision-making process without proper engagement with councillors. Let me explain why.

The decision to make cuts was made in the February budget meeting, and preceded any public consideration of a range of alternatives. Although we have been advised by BHCC officials that the decision not to look at any strategic alternatives was a Council

decision, there is no evidence that this choice was ever put to a Council meeting. Subsequently, when local residents have raised strategic alternatives for consideration, these have been rejected as they would ‘take too long’ to implement.

- The analysis supporting the decision was misleading to the Council, incomplete and skewed. It included references to the ‘high costs’ of running the Rottingdean Grange as a factor in decision making, which were in fact not relevant to the cost of running the library.
- The plans talk about a needs and use analysis, in fact this focused on economic deprivation, and did not consider the very high usage of Rottingdean library.
- Local needs have not been fully considered and the impact on protected groups will not be adequately mitigated by the proposals. The proposal highlighted the proximity of schools to other libraries, but this was not done for Rottingdean with its two primary schools and two nurseries, whose children all use the library.
- The equality impact assessment showed very high impact on protected groups including older people, without sufficient mitigation. It suggested that older residents could be served, with increasing isolation, in their own homes, via electronic or delivery services, despite the fact that Brighton and Hove intend to make cuts in these very services.

Following a freedom of information request to BHCC and the DCMS, the deadline for response has been extended by another month while a ‘public interest test’ is applied on revealing to us what was in their correspondence about this – it seems very concerning that it could be considered in the public interest to keep this secret!

A short term tactical decision to close will result in a permanent loss of this facility.

In the light of the upcoming National Year of Reading, does the committee agree with the Labour Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport that closing libraries is cultural vandalism? We strongly urge the committee to reject this proposal as poorly and improperly made.

### **Supporting information:**

Further Information for committee members including about local library use, petition and consultation responses can be found on our website

[www.saverottingdeanlibrary.co.uk](http://www.saverottingdeanlibrary.co.uk)

## **(2) Deputation concerning Westdene Library**

### **Supported by:**

Alicia Buckingham (Speaker)

Isobel Foxon

Kate Reid

David Powell

Alice foster

Leo Bryant

Louise Cotter

Stephen Grey

Ali Bennet

Sofia Esposito

Steph Pomfrett

Esther Sweeney

### **Summary of deputation:**

#### **Westdene Library – Summary Submission**

Submitted by: Alicia Buckingham, Isobel Foxon, and Kate Reid

Purpose: To oppose the proposed closure of Westdene Library and provide community evidence of its importance.

---

#### **Key Points from Main Submission**

##### **Introduction:**

- Westdene Library is a vital and irreplaceable community hub, serving children, families, and residents as the only free, accessible public space in the area. Co-located with Westdene Primary School (476 pupils), the library is used by a wide range of people — from young children starting their reading journey, to students studying, and older residents seeking connection to combat social and digital isolation.
- The Council has not sufficiently supported or invested in this space in recent years, missing significant opportunities to increase footfall and realise the wider benefits the library brings — including easing pressure on other local services in the long term. The Council is mistaken in assuming Patcham is a suitable alternative library, particularly for those who benefit most from Westdene Library, and has therefore underestimated the societal cost of closure.
- Westdene Library should remain part of the Brighton & Hove Library Service. A community or volunteer-run model is not a sustainable or equitable alternative for a resource of this importance, especially one increasingly relied upon by Westdene Primary School.

##### **Historic lack of Support/Investment:**

- The historic and ongoing lack of Council-led investment and programming at Westdene Library has led to a decline in visitor numbers. There have been no Council-managed events at Westdene for over two years, whereas all other Brighton libraries have continued to host regular community activities.
- We request an explanation for this disparity and propose that the Council explore a partnership approach with the community to support events and activities within a Council-run library, thereby increasing visitor numbers and maximising the library's benefits [Event summary analysis submitted separately<sup>1</sup>].

---

<sup>1</sup> See attached document "[Comparison of Brighton Library Events](#)"

### Alternatives & Digital Access:

- We reject the assertion that Patcham Library is a viable alternative, due to the steep hills, busy main road, and lack of direct public transport links between the two areas. The walk represents a one-hour round trip, making regular visits impractical, particularly for children, older residents, and those with mobility issues.
- Closure will therefore increase digital and social isolation for those most in need. Even those with car access are unlikely to replace a quick, post-school library visit with a 20-minute round car trip at the end of the day, denying children the opportunity to visit a library regularly and enjoy the many developmental and long term benefits this provides<sup>2</sup>.

### Data:

- Residents request that the Council publish the full assessment of the harm caused by closing Westdene Library compared with the proposed cost saving of only £20,000.
- We ask that this assessment be re-run without assuming Patcham as a viable alternative, and with recognition of the untapped potential to grow usage and therefore benefits at Westdene through an events programme (potentially with community partnership).
- Given Westdene School's unique direct access to the library, we are concerned that the impact on pupils' regular library access has not been fully considered. We therefore request confirmation that this has been properly evaluated and included in the assessment of harm caused by the closure.

### Conclusion:

- The Council's financial pressures are understood; however, we must also recognise the long-term social and educational costs of removing such an essential local service. Once a library is lost, it is rarely restored — and the impact on the community, particularly on children and those experiencing isolation, is lasting.
- Westdene Library is a cornerstone of community life — its preservation is about community, opportunity, inclusion, and wellbeing for current and future generations.

---

### Separate Submissions

- "Comparison of Brighton Library Events" - Events summary since June 2023 submitted separately, comparing Westdene with other Brighton libraries.
- "Residents Views"- Residents' detailed statements submitted separately

### Supporting Information:

### Comparison of Brighton Libraries and Council-Hosted Events

Library	Council-listed event volume (June 2023–present)	Representative event examples / frequency
Jubilee (Brighton Central)	Many	Age Without Limits Action Day (Mar 2024); Powerful Postcards workshop; regular storytime (weekly)
Hove Library	Many	Storytime (weekly); Adult groups and author talks (monthly)
Portslade Library	Moderate	Needlecraft group (weekly); Festive Crafts workshop (seasonal)
Whitehawk Library	Moderate	Time to Create (weekly adult arts & crafts)
Moulsecoomb Library	Moderate	Storytime (weekly); Summer exhibition drop-ins (seasonal)

---

<sup>2</sup> [The British Reader is in Decline as The Reading Agency Reveals Half of UK Adults Don't Read Regularly - The Reading Agency](#)

Patcham Library	Moderate/Few	Patcham Book Group (monthly); Family craft sessions (weekly)
Coldean Library	Few	Storytime at Coldean Library (weekly)
Rottingdean Library	Few	Storytime (0–5s sessions, weekly)
Saltdean Library	Few	Occasional story/craft events (term-time)
Woodingdean Library	Few	Family or story sessions (occasional)
Hangleton Library	Few	Storytime or branch activities (weekly/biweekly)
Hollingbury Library	Few	Occasional local branch activities (monthly/term-time)
<b>Westdene Library</b>	One	Winter Crafts Fair – Dec 2023

### Summary/Analysis

- Lack of Events and Engagement: Westdene Library has only had one event in the last 2.5 years. Other libraries, including smaller branches, hold regular weekly, monthly, or seasonal events that make an effort to engage their local communities.
- This demonstrates Westdene Library has been neglected relative to other branches in the network
- The limited activity at Westdene reflects a lack of Council attention and promotion, rather than a lack of community interest.
- Assessments citing low visitor numbers fail to consider the absence of incentives or opportunities for residents to visit.
- Greater Council engagement and community outreach should have been the first step before concluding that the library is underused or proposing its closure.
- The Council should explore whether they could work with the local community to support events and activities within a council run library before concluding closure.

**Alice foster:** I have recently had a baby and we have been using Westdene library more than ever. It's such a wonderful space to go with small children to choose books, read and relax. As a primary school teacher, I am incredibly aware of the impact sharing stories with young children has on their success later in life. I felt so lucky to live so close to a library as it meant we could go regularly and swap books to enjoy at home. As a new mum, being able to leave the house on foot, rather than getting in the car, is really important. Closure of this library would hugely impact me and others in a similar situation and would be a real loss to our community. We should be aiming to encourage young readers and closing libraries is certainly not the way to do that. If attendance of the library is low, perhaps starting a monthly story or rhyme time would encourage people to take advantage of our wonderful library (I am sure people in our community would help with this!).

**Leo Bryant:** We really want to minimise screen time for our daughter so it's invaluable having a ready local supply of new books. She's making great progress with her reading, it would be such a shame not to support local literacy and mental health with a library service.

**Louise Cotter:** "I use the library to study, as I get so distracted at home. It is a nice and peaceful environment and when I go on a Tuesday, the librarian offers me a cup of tea! I also use the library with both my children. They enjoy sitting in the bean bags to read the books on offer and having that huge variety is amazing. Now my eldest is learning to read, having access to early reader books has been brilliant!"

**Stephen Grey:** "I come to the library to email my granddaughter in Australia. I don't have the internet at home, and since I lost my wife during the pandemic, these visits mean a lot to me. I rely on the librarian being here on Tuesdays, and I look forward to seeing people every week. I don't drive, and getting to Patcham would be impossible—walking there and back, up and down the hills, is far too much for me."

**Ali Bennet:** The closure of the library would make it really hard to incorporate the library and free books into our lives. We regularly visit the library to sit and read and decompress after school. The 'alternative' of Patcham isn't accessible. You can't walk there with young kids nor take the bus. The library is a free place we can expose ourselves to a wider range of reading. I use it to order and collect books if they aren't in. The reality is the alternative would be buying and that's costly, not viable and wasteful. We love this community resource and it's loss will have a detrimental impact on the breadth of stuff we read

**Sofia Esposito:** I grew up visiting this local library from the time I started at Westdene Primary School. It was more than just a building full of books, it was a place of discovery, imagination, and belonging. I still remember sitting in the children's corner, losing myself in stories that sparked my love of reading and learning. Today, that same library is just as vital for young people. Our library gives every child the chance to explore books, stories, and ideas, regardless of background. Closing it would close the door to opportunity for too many.

**Steph Pomfrett:** "Hi! I spoke in the meeting—as someone with mental health issues, ADHD and autism, the library is a safe, welcoming space; I know my son can go there safely on a Tuesday when it's staffed. Also, if we lose the library, there is very little provision on this side of the city. Patcham is walkable if you're able-bodied (as I am), but it's also more than a mile away on foot and it's very difficult to get a direct, easy bus. For disabled and elderly residents, or someone with small children, it means walking up and down the hill from London Road. Alternatively, it's a long bus journey into town."

**Esther Sweeney:** "I've used Westdene Library consistently since 2013. It's a quiet community space where I can work, meet other parents, and share a love of books with my children. Our weekly visits with librarian Claire have boosted our wellbeing, reduced isolation, and encouraged my children to read every day. Losing this space would take away an important place for learning, connection, and time off screens for our children and community."

**Ruth Williams:** The library itself is such a warm and welcoming space. It's somewhere we can go together for some quiet time that doesn't cost anything, which as any parent knows, is rare and really valuable. It's one of those places that quietly brings people together. If the library were to close, it would make things much harder for families like ours. The next nearest library means getting a bus, which just isn't easy with a small child, and it would really cut down how often we could go. It's not just about convenience, it's about keeping something local that people actually use and love. I know budgets are tight, but closing Westdene Library would be a real loss for the whole community. It's not just a building full of books.. I really hope you will think carefully about what this space means to the people who use it every day.

**Tara Coffey:** Westdene library is the heart and core of our community. It has been the foundation and ongoing lifeline for me and my family including my 4 year old daughter who has T21 and my adult brother in law who has significant learning difficulties. Westdene is a hilly area with one (unreliable) bus route so there is little to do/no where to go especially in bad weather. Libraries are never going to make monetary profit but closing it down will cause an educational, social, economic, debt. I can't offer you the money required to keep this library open. (Pennies in comparison to the overall budget). But would love to see it thrive further with some voluntary staffed hours, storytime or more regular events.

### **(3) Deputation concerning Westdene Library**

#### **Supported by:**

David Powell  
Jamie Lancaster  
Jennifer Clarke  
Chris Clarke

Jonathan Tacon  
Gemma Tacon  
Judith Hook  
Sophie Broadbent

**Summary of deputation:**

The proposed closure of Westdene library is met with strong opposition from the community. The library, once a vibrant and well-staffed space, has suffered from reduced hours, limited resources, and a loss of space to the neighbouring school. The author argues for the library's reopening with increased community engagement and investment, questioning the council's decision-making process and its impact on local services.

