

**Councillor Tom Anderson Statement of Case  
Re: Woodchurch Library**

Wirral Library Service Inquiry  
Ref: S.10(1) Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964  
Public Libraries (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992

Along with my colleagues in Wirral Conservative Group I have opposed the Council decision to close 11 Libraries throughout Wirral. In this Statement of Case I will seek to outline that the Council decision to close Woodchurch Library, pertaining to my own Ward, is deficient and contravenes both the meaning and spirit of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 for the following reasons:

1. Given the location of Woodchurch Library, Woodchurch's high population density, poor transport links, poor educational achievement and high levels of deprivation residents will not have adequate access to a comprehensive and efficient Library Service.
2. The standing 'Corporate Vision and Ambition for the Public Library Service' (2004) has not been amended and was not used to inform the pattern of library provision prior to the closure of 11 libraries. As there has been no published change to this vision, no analysis or discussion can have been given to the Woodchurch Library and its ability to deliver any outcomes the Council would want from the service.
3. There has been no assessment carried out on the re-provision of services contained within Woodchurch Library. For example, free internet access, Adult Reading Group, Children's Reading Group, Skills for Life Courses, Citizens Advice Bureau and regular 'coffee mornings' were members of the community can interact and avoid isolation and exclusion.
4. There is no evidence of a Disability Impact Assessment being carried out prior to the decision to close 11 libraries.
5. Woodchurch Library was not in the original plans for closure contained in the Strategic Asset Review (SAR). Council did not carry out any consultation with customers concerning the closure of Woodchurch Library. Staff, users and ward councillors only became aware of closure on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2009 some two months after the SAR was announced, severely impeding any time to make representations and/or appeals to Council.
6. The case for closure is primarily a financial one based on the need for Council savings of £796, 000. However, Council had £5,000,000 in an Efficiency Investment Budget (revenue) unallocated at the time of setting Council's 2009 – 2010 budget.

## Councillor Tom Anderson Proof of Evidence Re: Woodchurch Library

Wirral Library Service Inquiry

Ref: S.10(1) Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964

Public Libraries (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992

1. Woodchurch Estate is the largest council housing estate on Wirral and the second largest estate on Merseyside. It houses approximately 9,000 residents, many of whom have low incomes, 32% of working age are unemployed. There are a high proportion of single families and elderly. Woodchurch includes five full Super Output Areas (SOAs) and as a result benefits from a Neighbourhood Pathways Programme. Of the five SOAs, one is in the top 3% in the country for levels of multiple deprivation, one is in the top 5% and the other three are in the top 10%.<sup>1</sup> Woodchurch Library plays a pivotal role in the various initiatives to improve social and educational aspects in the area.

Within Woodchurch there are two secondary schools (Woodchurch High, Meadowside special school), three primary schools (Fender Primary, Woodchurch CofE and St Michaels & All Angels) and one early years learning centre (Ganneys Meadow) that is situated in the grounds of the Library. Ganneys Meadow provides; education for three and four year old children, support for families, health advice and adult education. Woodchurch Library was relocated to this site to provide better educational outcomes and act as a community hub where a broad range of services can be accessed by the community. Education attainment on Woodchurch is poorer than on Wirral as a whole. Closure of Woodchurch Library would hinder educational progress for both school children and adults. People without internet access at home will also find themselves at a loss in accessing web and digital media. 25% of twenty five to thirty four years olds on the estate have no qualifications. The data for education attainment is demonstrated in the following table:<sup>2</sup>

<b>Educational Attainment in Woodchurch</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>Wirral (2007)</b>
% of children (aged 4) reaching Foundation Level 6 or higher in Communication, Language and Literacy	51.0%	40.0%	45.7%	57.6%
<b>% of pupils (aged 11) achieving Level 4 or high in English at KS2</b>	<b>76.9%</b>	<b>81.6%</b>	<b>72.2%</b>	<b>81.5%</b>
% of pupils (aged 11) achieving Level 4 or high in Maths at KS2	66.4%	72.4%	78.2%	78.2%
% of pupils (aged 11) achieving Level 4 or high in Science at KS2	79.1%	87.2%	84.3%	88.7%
<b>% of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSEs graded A*-C</b>	<b>44.2%</b>	<b>45.8%</b>	<b>51.7%</b>	<b>62.1%</b>
Average points score at GCSE	294.7	315.7	300.1	370.2
Eligibility for free school meals at primary school	45.5%	46.9%	46.1%	29.3%
<b>Eligibility for free school meals at secondary school</b>	<b>42.4%</b>	<b>43.7%</b>	<b>43.9%</b>	<b>27.6%</b>

Data is taken for pupils who live in Woodchurch regardless of which school in Wirral they attend. The eligibility of pupils for free school meals is taken as a proxy for poverty

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>

<sup>2</sup> Wirral Council, Children and Young People's Department

Transport links in Woodchurch are prohibitive in nature and there is no direct public transport to the nearest available library were Woodchurch Library to close. The number of Woodchurch households without access to a car is 47.98%, well above the nation average of 30%. Commercial bus fares increased by 9% in 2006 alone, this would cause excessive hardship to Woodchurch residents and prevent access to key facilities, contrary to Wirral Council's own Access Plan.<sup>3</sup>

2. The Council's Corporate Vision for Libraries has not been updated since 2004. The Cabinet has stated that they wish to improve library services with fewer but better facilities. However, as yet I am unaware of what these new facilities will contain, when they will be built and where they are to be located. As far as I am aware staff, users and members have not been consulted in what the new vision should be and how this will affect the users of Woodchurch Library if it were to close. As of now access to Libraries in Wirral is considered to be excellent, with 87% of the population able to visit a library within fifteen minutes<sup>4</sup>. No consideration has been evidenced of what effect the closure of Woodchurch library will have on residents' travelling time.

3. Other services within Woodchurch Library will be put at risk if it were to close. No alternative locations have been identified as to where the mentioned services would be placed. If services were to be placed outside of the estate, then the same arguments arise concerning accessibility, transportation and impact on deprivation indices. At no point did the current administration explore alternative re-provision of services. As for the promise of £20,000,000 capital investment for 'super centres' and smaller satellite hubs, Cabinet took the decision that Woodchurch would no longer be eligible for either, due to the retention of the Leisure Centre<sup>5</sup>. Woodchurch Leisure centre provides a selection of services suited to tackling health and social inequalities, rather than educational. Cabinet originally earmarked Woodchurch, with the strong possibility of the Library site, as one of the smaller satellite hubs<sup>6</sup>. It is my opinion that cabinet simply disregarded Woodchurch Library and a satellite centre in Woodchurch because it was an easy option without carrying out any studies or analysing the consequences.

4. When asked by the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management confirmed that no Disability Impact Assessment had been conducted prior to recommending the closure of eleven Wirral Libraries. This may contravene S.49A (1) Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (amended in DDA 2005) and so could possibly be considered unlawful.

---

<sup>3</sup> Wirral Access Plan 2006

<sup>4</sup> Ibid,

<sup>5</sup> Wirral Council, Cabinet Decision, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009

<sup>6</sup> Wirral Council, Cabinet Report, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

5. When the Strategic Asset Review was published for consideration on 27th November 2008, Woodchurch Library was not recommended for closure. A report to Cabinet stated:

***'it is important to maintain a service delivery presence on the eastern side of this area (Woodchurch), which contains pockets of serious deprivation.***

***Having regard to the corporate priority of 'improving health and well being for all, ensuring people who require support are full participants in mainstream society'; it is recommended that Woodchurch Library is retained and forms the nucleus of a multipurpose complex, notwithstanding current relatively low levels of usage. This recommendation is justified by the level of needs of local people in the Woodchurch area and illustrates the sort of multi-dimensional complexities involved in the SAR: simply looking at library usage levels would have been too simplistic and resulted in an inequitable outcome.'***<sup>7</sup>

This recommendation from the Chief Executive was endorsed unanimously by Cabinet. However, the cabinet decision nearly two months later, when the limited consultation process had expired, approved Woodchurch Library to close. Cabinet stated the rationale for this was:

***'That, in response to substantial public representation, and in recognition of the fact that it is geographically central to a number of deprived areas and housed in a building of historic interest, Upton Library be retained and Woodchurch Library closed.'***<sup>8</sup>

Cabinet's decision is inequitable, contradictory and does not purport to a comprehensive and efficient library service for Woodchurch residents. Cabinet's earlier decision to retain Woodchurch Library because of 'pockets of serious deprivation' concluding it is 'justified by the level of needs of local people in the Woodchurch area' was disregarded. This is in stark contrast to the latter decision claiming that another library, outside of the Woodchurch estate, can service numerous deprived areas. Cabinet again seem to have carried out no investigation how one central library can service a number of deprived areas, without actually stating; how many deprived areas, effects on deprivation indices, access, transportation and educational attainment impacts. The Council sought to justify closing one Library (Woodchurch) that the public, users and councillors were told would remain open due to 'substantial public representations' of another library, which was earmarked for closure, is untenable. Users of Woodchurch Library were not concerned simply because they believed it would remain open. They had no opportunity to engage and consult on it's closure. Representations were made to Council by me in the form of a petition, of which 860 residents signed, in an extremely short period of time, against the closure of Woodchurch Library and

---

<sup>7</sup> Wirral Council, Cabinet Report, 27<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Wirral Council, Cabinet Decision, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2009

complaining about the lack of consultation.<sup>9</sup> DCMS guidelines states that a comprehensive and efficient library service should be in line with peoples 'needs and requirements'<sup>10</sup> It is my opinion Council breached these guidelines because they simply did not ask Woodchurch residents, or indeed, Wirral residents, what their needs and requirements are.

6. The original public financial case was built on the cost to the Council of maintaining its buildings. This changed to the staffing revenue costs of running Libraries. The savings arising from the closure of 11 Libraries has been agreed by the Director of Finance and the Director of Law, HR and Asset Management as £796,000.<sup>11</sup> The Council's budget book for 2009-2010 shows that the Council has significant amounts of revenue unallocated, including £5 million in the Efficiency Investment Budget, that could be deployed without destabilising the Council's long term budget plans or impacting negatively on residents Council Tax.

Signed:



Date: 17<sup>th</sup> May 2009

**Councillor Tom Anderson**  
Wirral MBC  
Upton Ward

---

<sup>9</sup> Wirral Council, Meeting of the Full Council, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2009

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/libraries/3416.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/libraries/3416.aspx)

<sup>11</sup> Wirral Council, Budget Council, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009