

CALDERDALE SAVE OUR SERVICES

SAVE HORTON HOUSE

REQUEST TO CALDERDALE COUNCIL SCRUTINY PANELS TO CONSIDER THE FUTURE OF HORTON HOUSE

1. Calderdale Save Our Services is a group of local residents and trades unionists working to defend jobs and services in the Calder Valley against the Government's Austerity and Privatisation policies.

2. Calderdale Save Our Services requests that the appropriate Scrutiny Panel(s) examine the decision made by the Cabinet meeting on 18 June 2012 and endorsed by the Full Council on 25 July 2012 to "dispose of" Horton House, which is currently the Adult Education Centre in Halifax. We believe that the Cabinet decision of 18 June 2012 is not sufficient authority to change Adult Learning provision in Halifax for the following reasons:

- Inadequate consideration at cabinet,
- Lack of consultation and failure of the 'Duty to Involve' both service users and partners.
- Lack of assessment of impact on the most disadvantaged.
- Making the decision without consideration of the costs and details of relocation of the service.
- Delegation of the final decision to officers and the Portfolio holder without the requirement to bring back to cabinet reports of the necessary consultation.

3. The report incorporating the decision to dispose of Horton House is the "Asset Management Review - Halifax Town Centre Office Strategy" and was prepared by Calderdale Council's Director - Economy and Environment. This can be read at: <http://www.calderdale.gov.uk/council/councillors/councilmeetings/showdocset.jsp?id=18740>

4. This report is mainly concerned with providing additional workstations for council officers at Westgate House and Princess Buildings and rationalising the office space in Halifax that is used by council officers. The vacation and disposal of Northgate House is a key consideration in the report. The only times that Horton House is mentioned in the report are the following:

"3.2 Approval to the recommendations for Halifax Town Centre office accommodation will also: ...

"Allow leases for Dean Clough, Hoover Buildings and Elsie Whiteley to be terminated at the earliest opportunity, and Northgate House, Park Road and Horton House to be disposed of."

And:

"6. Proposed Solution

“6.1 Based on the financial and qualitative options appraisal work undertaken by the project team, the following solution was reported to and approved by the AM/FM Programme Board:

...

“Vacation and disposal of the Council’s properties at Park Road and Horton House.”

5. Calderdale Save Our Services is concerned that through this minimal consideration in the report, Calderdale Council has decided to sell Horton House. In the light of this, the Campaign sent an e-mail asking the following questions to Cllr Barry Collins on 6 Aug 2012:

“1. If Horton House is to be closed and sold, will the Council provide alternative adult education facilities that are as good as, or better than the existing facilities at Horton House?”

“2. Where and how would such facilities be provided? Would there be a new purpose built Adult Education Centre?”

“3. When does the Council plan to close and sell Horton House?”

“4. What consultation will the Council carry out with adult education students and tutors using Horton House over the closure of the building and the development of alternative facilities?”

6. Cllr Collins’ eventual reply on 20 September included:

“As you know, the council recently decided to move Adult Learning out of Horton House. Current thinking would be to re-site the service within the Shay Stadium complex, which would become the Calderdale centre for workforce training and development ... It is, however, dependent on the final conclusions of the council’s wider workforce review and the on-going debate about the future of the Shay itself.”

7. The full text of the e-mail to Cllr Collins together with his reply is reproduced at Appendix 1 of this document.

8. Cllr Collins’ reply to our e-mail failed to answer most of the questions we asked. The Campaign is further concerned that the decision to “dispose of” Horton House was taken with very few people being aware of it and a total absence of consultation. There was no mention of Horton House being sold off in the Halifax Town Centre consultation that took place between July and September 2012. Inclusion of this proposal would have been a legitimate matter for public discussion in that widely publicised consultation, although inclusion in the Halifax Town Centre consultation by itself would not have been sufficient. The Campaign regards full and extensive consultation with adult education students, tutors and the wider community as an essential which should have taken place **before** any proposal to dispose of Horton House was considered.

9. The suggestion, vague as it is in Cllr Collins reply, of moving Adult Learning to the Shay Stadium complex is a totally unacceptable alternative – the Shay is located some way out of

Halifax Town Centre and we believe there would be problems of conflicts when matches are being played at the Stadium as well as Safeguarding issues.

10. Calderdale Save Our Services raised the future of Horton House at the Calderdale Partnership for Adult Learning and Skills meeting that took place on 29 October 2012. This meeting expressed alarm at the decision to sell off Horton House and took the view that Adult learning in Halifax would be best served by the reversal of this decision.

11. A question to the Leader of Calderdale Council about Horton House was asked at the full Calderdale Council meeting on 28 November 2012. The most alarming aspect of Cllr Swift's answer was the suggestion that the Council was going to make its final decision about relocating Adult Learning first and then consult learners several months afterwards as the following extract shows:

“Over the next few weeks, we will be making sure we understand fully the requirements of the Adult Learning service and its users before making a final decision about relocating ... Whatever options are identified, Calderdale Adult Learning Managers will consult with learners in the Spring and Summer terms 2013...”

12. The question to the Leader of the Council along with his full answer are set out in Appendix 2 of this document.

13. Cllr Swift's answer only begged more questions, so further questions about the future of Horton House were asked at the Cabinet meeting on Monday 10 December 2012.

14. Again in Cllr Swift's second answer, we were astonished to learn that the final decision over the future of Horton House is to be taken by the Director of Economy and Environment in consultation with Cllr Collins and one other senior officer, without the issue of the future of Adult Learning in Halifax being considered at Cabinet:

“The decision by Council in July 2012 gave approval to vacation and disposal of Horton House as part of the programme of Halifax Town Centre Office Strategy, but this is subject to implementation being delegated to the Director – Economy and Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Environment and the Head of Democratic and Partnership Services.”

15. The full answer to this further question to the Leader of the Council is set out in Appendix 3 of this document.

16. Ian Gray, Calderdale Council's Director of Economy and Environment invited a couple of Calderdale SOS supporters to a meeting about the future of Horton House on 19 December 2012. At this meeting, Mr Gray explained that future proposals for Adult Learning in Halifax need to come from Children and Young People's Service to Cabinet where the decision on the future of Horton House will be made. While this meeting took place before the answer to

the Cabinet question had been released, Mr Gray's version of events is at variance with Cllr Swift's answer set out above. Indeed the more we have engaged with officers and councillors about Horton House, the more contradictory information we have received.

17. Horton House benefits from having a Town Centre location and is a popular, well-used Adult Education Centre offering some 70 different courses each week. Horton House was found in the Equality Impact Assessment (2010) to be an almost ideal and much loved central base for adults' learning; the only shortage is in space and that seems unlikely to be resolved at any other Halifax Town Centre location.

18. The consideration (or arguably, lack of consideration) of the future of Horton House has been an example of local authority process and decision making at its worst. Horton House was mentioned just twice in the thirteen page Halifax Town Centre Office Strategy Report and the report didn't even mention that Horton House was where Calderdale Adult Learning's Halifax Centre is located. There has been no consultation leading us to suspect that the Council has been trying to get rid of Horton House on the quiet. Calderdale Save Our Services has had to go to considerable lengths over several months in its efforts to extract information from Calderdale Council about what is going on regarding Horton House. Calderdale Save Our Services believes that this decision must not be made under delegated authority without due process having been followed. The Campaign believes that the future of Adult Education in Halifax deserves far better consideration than it has received so far.

19. As we stated as part of our response to Halifax Town Centre consultation, "Calderdale Save Our Services believes that Adult Education in Halifax may best be served by reversing the decision to close Horton House".

20. We therefore request that the relevant Calderdale Council Scrutiny Panel(s) review the decision making process in relation to the closure of Horton House and require that no final decision is made until Cabinet has received and discussed:

- A report on the consultation with service users and relevant partners.
- A complete Equalities Impact Assessment in relation to the removal of this facility and the establishment of services elsewhere.
- A clear proposal for the establishment of town centre adult education services in suitable venue.

January 2013

Appendix 1

E-mail from Calderdale Save Our Services to Cllr Barry Collins dated 6 Aug 2012:

“At our last meeting, Calderdale Save Our Services was concerned to hear that Calderdale MBC plans to close and sell off Horton House, which houses Halifax's Adult Education Centre.

“We refer to the Halifax Town Centre Office Strategy report that was considered at the Cabinet meeting on 18 June. Part of Section 6 - Proposed Solution in this report proposes to dispose of Horton House. While the report concentrates on providing additional workstations for council officers at Westgate House and Princess Buildings, no mention is made of what will become of Adult Education facilities in Halifax. As we understand it, this 'Proposed Solution' was adopted as Council policy at the Council meeting on 25th July.

“We therefore wish to ask you the following:

“1. If Horton House is to be closed and sold, will the Council provide alternative adult education facilities that are as good as, or better than the existing facilities at Horton House?

“2. Where and how would such facilities be provided? Would there be a new purpose built Adult Education Centre?

“3. When does the Council plan to close and sell Horton House?

“4. What consultation will the Council carry out with adult education students and tutors using Horton House over the closure of the building and the development of alternative facilities?

“We look forward to receiving full information from you in response to these questions.”

Having had no response to this, Calderdale Save Our Services sent a reminder e-mail to Cllr Collins on 6 September. Cllr Collins replied as follows on 20 September:

“Thanks for your emails. As you know, the council recently decided to move Adult Learning out of Horton House. Current thinking would be to re-site the service within the Shay Stadium complex, which would become the Calderdale centre for workforce training and development. This proposal has been discussed in outline by our asset management team with Eileen Fawcett, the head of Adult Learning, and Stuart Smith, the Director of Children and Young People's Services. It is, however, dependent on the final conclusions of the council's wider workforce review and the on-going debate about the future of the Shay itself.”

QUESTION BY A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC
UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 12

COUNCIL MEETING ON 28TH NOVEMBER 2012

QUESTION FROM: PETE KEAL

TO: COUNCILLOR TIM SWIFT, LEADER

QUESTION

As part of the "Halifax Town Centre Office Strategy" report agreed at the Cabinet meeting on 18 June, Calderdale Council quietly decided to "dispose" of Horton House, Halifax's Adult Education Centre. There has been no consultation with students or staff at Horton House and no firm alternative proposals for Adult Learning. Will the Leader of the Council meet with users of Horton House and listen to their views? Will the Leader also refrain from regarding Horton House as a capital receipt towards the cost of the new Halifax Library and persuade the Council to reverse its decision over Horton House?

Answer

As Mr Keal indicates, Cabinet on 18th June set out a Town Centre Office Strategy (TCOS) which proposes to relocate a number of Council Services to other properties within the Council's existing property estate. This will ensure that services are based in the right location and operate from properties that are more suitable and cost effective, generating net savings of £7.5m over 20 years. It's important to understand the context for this:-

Firstly, the Council faces huge financial pressures, having already identified savings of some £40m since 2010 but needing to find an equivalent amount over the next four years.

Secondly, the Council currently operates from over 350 buildings. It costs more than £10M a year simply to run these buildings. Many of these are in a very poor state of repair, with more than £5m maintenance needed just to deal with urgent works.

Over the next few weeks, we will be making sure we understand fully the requirements of the Adult Learning service and its users before making a final decision about relocating.

There is no funding allocated to the new Central Library from any capital receipt generated from the potential disposal of Horton House.

The optimum month for any relocation of Adult Learning from Horton House is August 2013. Whatever options are identified, Calderdale Adult Learning Managers will consult with learners in the Spring and Summer terms 2013, and I will be happy to meet with users as part of that process. This will allow effective planning for the start of the new academic year in September 2013.

QUESTION TO CABINET 10th December 2012

From: Pete Keal

To: Councillor T Swift

Question

Following Councillor Swift's answer to questions about the future of Horton House at the Council meeting on 28th November, why does the Council plan to make a final decision about reallocating the Adult Learning Service in the next few weeks but not consult learners until after this final decision has been made? Who is going to make this so-called final decision? Where in Halifax Town Centre will the Council be able to provide facilities for Adult Learning that are as good as or better than Horton House?

Response

Work is continuing by officers to make sure we fully understand the requirements of the Adult Learning Service and its users before we make a final decision about relocating these services. This review is being undertaken in consultation with colleagues from the Adult Learning Service to make sure the needs of the service and its users are properly understood and reflected in whichever alternative location is proposed.

As I said to Mr Keal in my answer to his question at full Council, I want to make sure that there is also careful consultation with the existing users at Horton Street, and I am happy to meet with them as part of this consultation process.

The decision by Council in July 2012 gave approval to vacation and disposal of Horton House as part of the programme of Halifax Town Centre Office Strategy, but this is subject to implementation being delegated to the Director – Economy and Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Environment and the Head of Democratic and Partnership Services.

It will be the decision of this group working in conjunction with the Adult Learning Service on whether to proceed with vacation and disposal of Horton House and relocation of services to an appropriate alternative location. This decision will only be taken when the findings are available from the officer's review. The alternative location has yet to be confirmed.