

<b>Subject:</b>	Relocation of One Stop Shop	<b>Status:</b>	For Publication
<b>Report to:</b>	Overview & Scrutiny (Policy) Cabinet Council	<b>Date:</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> November 2012 28 <sup>th</sup> November 2012 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2012
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Head of Finance &amp; Property Service</b>	<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	<b>Customers, Legal &amp; Licensing</b>
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Community Impact Assessment:</b>	Required:	Yes	Attached: Yes
<b>Biodiversity Impact Assessment</b>	Required:	No	Attached: No
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<b>1.</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
1.1	That Members agree to the capital investment of £160,000 and the relocation of the One Stop Shop (OSS) from Rawtenstall to The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup.
1.2	That Members agree to the immediate marketing of the OSS in order to seek and secure a tenant. Should that not be successful, Members agree to the demolition of the current OSS once all services and staff have vacated. Timing details and contract matters being delegated to the Director of Business in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of the report is to consider the relocation of the current Rawtenstall based One Stop Shop (OSS) to The Business Centre, Futures Park, Bacup.

## 3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:
- **A clean and green Rossendale** – creating a better environment for all.
  - **A healthy and successful Rossendale** – supporting vibrant communities and a strong economy.
  - **Responsive and value for money local services** – responding to and meeting the different needs of customers and improving the cost effectiveness of services.

## 4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:
- Reputation: Increase in empty buildings
  - Legal: Planning consents or heritage restrictions on the use of buildings
  - Legal: Ensuring due regard is given to Development Control matters.
  - Financial: Implications arising from the Local Government Finance Bill and the retention of local business rates as from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 negating the benefits of reducing business rates currently incurred by the Council.
  - Financial: Council should ensure that in the use or disposal of any asset, deemed surplus to its requirements, that it will always have due regard of current legislation, relevant guidance and best practice.
  - Reputational and Financial Dealing with a mix of clients: customers with differing needs

and priorities.

- Financial: Continuing the use of the STAN (Services to a Neighbourhood) mobile office to target outlying locations.
- Legal and Financial: Ensuring the Council meets its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

## 5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

5.1 The Council has forecast in its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) the need to save in excess of £1.3m from its annual revenue cost base by 2014/15. As a result and as part of a series of measures the Council has commenced a review of its key operational and empty (or potentially surplus) buildings. A previous report was originally presented to Cabinet in June 2012 on this matter which authorised a period of public consultation particular on the location of the current One Stop Shop (OSS). The June 2012 gave saving target of £80k to £175k in relation to a wider accommodation review. In October Cabinet authorised a plan to deal with a number of surplus or non-customer facing properties. The relocation of the OSS will support the MTFS by providing c. £50k per annum of revenue savings.

The options for consideration are:

1. Vacate the current OSS and relocate to Futures Park Rossendale
2. Remain in the OSS, this option would mean that key Council Services associated with Planning, Land Charges, Licensing and Building Control would still relocate to Futures Park, other services would continue to be delivered from Rawtenstall.

5.2 The current One Stop Shop in Rawtenstall was identified initially as a temporary location despite being in use since December 2005. At the time the medium term ambition was always for this site to form part of a wider Rawtenstall town centre redevelopment. This remains the case and is part of the area under consideration with our newly appointed development partners (Barfield and Together Housing).

The long term aspiration, in terms of Council operations, has always been to have one key site for Council Services. This has become more important as the number of employees the Council employs has reduced and there is a need to build capacity and create flexibility by being able to deploy staff to meet the peaks in service activity.

The services currently delivered by the One Stop Shop are as follows:

- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit
- Business Rates
- Homelessness
- Planning
- Land Charges
- Building Control
- Licensing and Planning Enforcement issues.

5.3 In addition, the following partners deliver services in the One Stop Shop:

- Citizens Advice Bureau Tuesdays and Thursdays am by appointment through the Bureau.
- Greenvale Homes Every day, drop in.
- Lancashire County Council Everyday, drop in.
- Ad hoc Partners: Calico Floating Support, Pension Service by appointment.

- 5.4 Cabinet agreed in June 2012, to undertake a period of consultation with staff, customers, community, voluntary, faith sector and partners in relation to the One Stop Shop including:
- Green Vale Homes
  - Lancashire County Council
  - Citizens Advice Bureau
  - Department of Works & Pensions
  - Capita
  - Whitworth Town Council
  - REAL / Community networks
  - Existing private tenants (Futures Park)

- 5.5 Consultation with customers included a footfall “Usage of the One Stop Shop” survey in relation to people who visited the One Stop Shop and a public wide survey “Making Ends Meet”.

The majority of respondents to the Making Ends Meet wider public survey told us that they have little contact with the council and only 7% thought that they would need to contact us monthly or more. However 62% thought that The Council needs to have a One Stop Shop.

71% of the respondents that use the OSS told us that they would visit the OSS just the same or more often if it moved to Bacup from Rawtenstall.

Consultation with customers through the Usage of the One Stop Shop Survey identified that the majority of customers tended to access the One Stop Shop to ask a question or get advice (58%), a smaller number needed assistance with filling in a form (20%). The vast majority of visits are repeat visits (75% visit more than once per year), with 45% of visitors attending monthly or even weekly.

In relation to actual demand, we know the following:

- For the calendar year Jan to Dec 2011:
  - Total number of customer contacts 562,241
  - Contacts via telephone 308,703 (55%)
  - Contacts via website 218,343 (39%)
  - Contacts via one stop shop 35,195 (6%)
- Total contacts via one stop shop for the past few fiscal years:
  - April 08-March 09 – 35,006
  - April 09-March 10 – 32,344
  - April 10-March 11 – 34,760
  - April 11-March 12 – 33,701

On average, there are c.34,000 visits per year to our One Stop Shop. We know that many of these are repeat visits and estimate that the actual number of people who visit the OSS per annum is around 2,750 (4% of the population).

It was recognised through the consultation that whilst the One Stop Shop has been successful in terms of central point for customer access, concern was expressed during the consultation in relation to it not being fit for purpose, oversubscribed and issues associated with privacy for customers was also raised during the consultation process.

Consultation was also undertaken with partners who utilise the One Stop Shop including: Greenvale Homes, the Citizens Advice Bureau, DWP, Calico, BT One Connect.

5.6 Members of the Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the One Stop Shop where a report was presented in September with regard to improving the efficiency of the activities undertaken by the One Stop Shop including: ensuring as many transactions as possible were available on the web, optimising the use of the telephones, improving the customer experience by the implementation of a unified customer information system and the continued availability of face to face contact through a One Stop Shop. It was minuted that "...overall everyone was in favour of the new proposals and the centralisation of services."

5.7 Following this presentations to Overview & Scrutiny (Policy), a Member Task & Finish Group on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> November 2012 considered, amongst other, the following:

- A new improved design
- Estimated conversion and transfer costs
- Cost options of retaining in Rawtenstall a fixed presence
- Location and provision, following consultation feedback
- Mixed use and occupancy (Council, Capita, private tenants)

The Task & Finish Group recommended as follows:

1. That the Accommodation Task and Finish Group recommend to Cabinet the move to Futures Park of the One Stop Shop with additional use of STAN to the West of the Borough.
2. That taking into account the long term future of STAN, consideration be given to exploring the possibility of outreach services in Rawtenstall

5.8 As part of the consultation the following Equality Groups were contacted:

- Rossendale Disability Forum
- Help Direct
- Greenvale Homes
- Callico- Floating Support
- Positive Start
- Staghills Childrens Centre
- Veterans in Action
- Rossdale Older Peoples Forum
- Bacup Family Centre
- Whitewell Bottom Community Centre
- Rossendale Valley Mencap
- Whitworth Childrens Centre
- Haslingden Community Link
- Balladen Childrens Centre
- The Maden Centre
- Islamic Centre Haslingden
- Islamic Centre Rawtenstall
- Welfare Rights
- Rossendale CAB
- Disability Equality Northwest
- Carers Contact
- Greenvale Homes

- Lancashire Link
- Age Concern
- Community Care
- Credit Unions

The impact on specific protected groups as defined by the Equality Act 2010 is included in the report and Members are asked to consider this as part of the decision making process. The Equality Impact Assessment has considered two options.

## 5.9 Option 1 – Relocate the One Stop Shop to Futures Park Bacup

### Planning and Land Charges Service

It is recognised that the relocation of the One Stop Shop from the west to the east of the Borough will have a positive impact on some people, whilst a negative impact on others. However, from the consultation undertaken with customers who access this service they are not negatively affected by the relocation of this service nor were any issues identified in relation to any protected equality groups.

### Building Control

It is recognised that the relocation of the One Stop Shop from the west to the east of the Borough will have a positive impact on some people, whilst a negative impact on others. However, from the consultation undertaken the customers who access this service they are not negatively affected by the relocation of this service nor were any issues identified in relation to any protected equality groups.

### Licensing

It is recognised that the relocation of the One Stop Shop from the west to the east of the Borough will have a positive impact on some people, whilst a negative impact on others. However, from the consultation undertaken the customers who access this service they are not negatively affected by the relocation of this service, a large number of taxi drivers are from the BME community. However, consultation with the taxi drivers has indicated they are mobile and could access this service regardless of location.

### Housing Options Team

This service has only been based at the One Stop Shop since 1.4.2011. Previously customers would ring to access a service and an appointment would be made at the One Stop Shop as required. It is recognised that the relocation of the One Stop Shop from the west to the east of the Borough will have a positive impact on some people, whilst a negative impact on others. Consultation with agencies representing young people indicated that those live in the Rawtenstall surrounding area would be impacted in a negative way. No specific negative impact has been identified for people from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community; the customers who use this service are primarily white British. However, again it would seem reasonable to assume that those who live in the vicinity of Rawtenstall which does have a higher BME community may be negatively affected.

### Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Business rates

It is recognised that the relocation of the One Stop Shop from the west to the east of the Borough will have a positive impact on some people, whilst a negative impact on others. However, from the consultation undertaken the customers who access this service who live in

the vicinity of Rawtenstall will be negatively affected by the relocation of this service, this includes older people, people with a disability, people from a BME background, men, women and man and women with children.

**Partners who utilise the One Stop Shop including, Greenvale Homes, Citizens Advice Bureau, DWP, Calico, BT One Connect**

Greenvale Homes currently have an office in Bacup, in the event of the One Stop Shop relocating to Futures Park. This could have a negative impact on Greenvale customers and Greenvale Homes would need to explore how they would meet the needs of their customers in Rawtenstall.

Citizens Advice Bureau Board Members gave a mixed response during the consultation. One member suggested that Bacup is only another 10 mins on the bus from Rawtenstall for those who already have bus passes, and is 'just down the road' for those who live in Bacup. Others commented that there are no other things to do at the same time, as there are in Rawtenstall, and thought it was more inconvenient at Futures Park for e.g. people who may need to have documents verified at the Post Office. It was noted that STAN could be used for this. One member suggested that rather than a static OSS, outreach could be provided one day per week in each of the district centres. A relocation of the One Stop Shop could have a negative impact on Citizen Advice Customers, who comprise vulnerable people and protected equality groups. The Bureau would need to explore how they could meet the needs of their customers, currently customers access this service on appointment basis Tuesday and Thursday mornings.

DWP have indicated that there are no issues for them with the relocation of the One Stop Shop.

Calico have indicated that the current OSS is no longer fit for purpose and consider it well used and oversubscribed. However they have expressed concern in relation to the cost of bus fares travelling to Futures Park and if customers would access a One Stop Shop at Futures Park.

BT One Connect are currently considering their arrangements in relation to delivering services at a District level. From a partner point of view, they were happy with the Futures Park building hosting the contact centre.

In mitigating any impact in "protected groups" as per the Equality Act 2010 the Council proposes to:

- Work with Lancashire County Council to maintain recent improvements to bus shelters (part of the Quality Bus route initiative) opposite the new location of the OSS and possible OSS signage.
- Raise awareness of the new location with Rossendale Bus drivers so that they are aware of the new potential location of the OSS to ensure that they are fully able to provide advice and guidance to public transport users of the OSS location on the Bus routes.
- Provide a link/signposting to bus time table information to the bus routes that service the new proposed location at Futures Park.
- Explore the use of STAN in offering an alternative service in neighbourhoods.

- Promote and raise awareness with current customers of how they can access services in a different way i.e. through the website.
- Communicate the changes through a Press Release, Letters to stakeholder, agencies, partners, voluntary, community groups and businesses.
- Increase the amount / type of transactions / functions that can be carried out via the councils website

#### 5.10 **Option 2 – One Stop Shop remains in its current location**

It is recognised that maintaining the One Stop Shop in Rawtenstall does have a neutral impact. However, it could be suggested that a One Stop Shop in Rawtenstall does have a negative impact on those that live in the East of Rossendale. In the event of the One Stop Shop remaining in its current location, there is still the need to build the capacity of the Council in relation to the services it delivers. The following services would still relocate to Futures Park: Planning, Land Charges, Licensing and Building Control. The relocation of these services does not have a negative impact on any specific protected group as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

### **COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:**

#### **6. SECTION 151 OFFICER**

6.1 As noted above and from the previous accommodation report and Medium Term Financial report of June 2012 the above proposals are, amongst other things, aimed primarily at reducing annual revenue expenditure to support the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

6.2 Current running cost for the OSS and the associated IT communications links are estimated at £50,000 – which also represents the potential saving. Capital investment at The Business Centre, Futures Park is estimated at c.£160,000. Surplus capital receipts generated in 12/13 can be used to finance the project.

Other alternative options, such as a new location on Rawtenstall either via existing Council or third party property simply incur capital expenditure ranging from £150k to £370k. In addition they do not serve the prime objective of reducing annual revenue expenditure and in the case of third party properties they increase current revenue costs. This matter was investigated and financial matters confirmed by the recent Task & Finish Group (November 2012).

6.3 The following action is proposed in relation to a vacated facility at Rawtenstall:

- Seek alternative private tenant. This search will commence immediately and ultimately has the potential to increase the estimated revenue savings.
- Failing the securing of a private tenant, to seek demolition (estimate c.£30k)

#### **7. MONITORING OFFICER**

7.1 Comments included with the report.

#### **8. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND POLICY (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)**

8.1 There are Human Resources Implications arising from the Report, in the event of a decision to relocate the One Stop Shop, 36 employees would need to be relocated. Full consultation has taken place with employees and the Trade Unions. It is envisaged that potentially nine employees will qualify for excess travel depending on where they currently live as per National Conditions and a local Trade Union agreement. Generally employees are supportive of the move to more quality accommodation. However consultation will continue to resolve any outstanding issues.

The Equality Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard in the exercising of its functions in relation to the three aims of the Equality Duty, for the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- Advanced equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

The amount of regard that is “due” is set out in the Act and will depend on the circumstances of the case. Under the general equality duty there is a requirement to engage with people with protected characteristics and to have an adequate evidence base for Council decision making. Further, the duty to inform, consult or involve requires that the council must involve communities and those directly affected at the most appropriate and proportionate level in ‘routine functions, in addition to one-off decisions.’ Further, under the duty of Best Value the Council is required to consult representatives of a wide range of local people; this should include local voluntary and community organisations and small businesses in such consultation. The findings of the consultation will be used to inform the decision making process. Where a negative impact is identified the Council will look to put measures in place to mitigate that impact. Members attention is drawn to the Equality Impact Assessment which details the impact of any decision on Equality Groups.

On 8<sup>th</sup> March 2012, the Welfare Reform Act received Royal Assent; the Act introduces a wide range of reforms. The main elements of the Act are: the introduction of Universal Credit, reforms to Disability Living Allowance, the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment, reforming Employment and Support Allowance, changes to support a new system of child support. These will have an impact on the shape and type of services delivered by the One Stop Shop in the future.

## 9. CONCLUSION

9.1 The Council is again facing a significant financial challenge over the medium term. The review and rationalisation of its operational assets will assist the Council in realising some of its financial savings target. Relocation to Futures Park will also improve the working environment for staff and for customers accessing services.

### Background Papers

Document	Place of Inspection
Various Property Working Papers (inter alia: options, costings, design)	Head of Finance
Consultation and response analysis	Service Assurance Team / Council website