

Title: Call-in of Cabinet Decision 5 July 2023 - Customer Services
Relocation Options

Lead Officer: Graham Leach, Head of Governance & Deputy Monitoring
officer (graham.leach@warwickdc.gov.uk or 01926456114)

Portfolio Holders: Councillors Davison and J Harrison

Wards of the District directly affected: None

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holders	N/A	Jessica Harrison Ian Davison
Finance	25/7/23	Andrew Rollins
Legal Services		
Chief Executive	25/7/23	Chris Elliott
Director of Climate Change	25/7/23	Dave Barber
Head of Service(s)	25/7/23 25/7/23 25/7/23 25/7/23 25/7/23	Phil Clarke Lisa Barker Steve Partner David Elkington Graham Leach
Section 151 Officer	25/7/23	Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	25/7/23	Andrew Jones
Leadership Co-ordination Group		N/A
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Potentially the decision could be a recommendation to Cabinet.	
Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?	No	
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?	No	
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?	Yes	
Accessibility Checked?	Yes	

Summary

On the 5 July 2023 the Cabinet considered the report - Customer Services Relocation Options. In accordance with the Council's call in procedure, three or more Councillors called-in the decisions to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee for consideration which in turn has referred it to Council.

Recommendation

- (1) The Council notes the Call-in procedure for Warwick District Council, as set out at appendix A to the report.
- (2) That in respect of the resolutions made by the Cabinet on the Customer Services Relocation Options, the Council takes one of the following options:
 - a. to take no action (If this is the case the decision can be implemented the next working day); or
 - b. refer the matter to the Cabinet for reconsideration setting out in writing the nature of its concerns.

1 Reasons for the Recommendation

- 1.1 The recommendations are in line with the procedure set out in the Council's Constitution under Council Procedure Rules for call-ins.
- 1.2 Council should be aware of the Call-in procedure, as set out at Appendix A to the report, and that only Cabinet can amend the decision that has been taken and neither the Overview & Scrutiny Committee nor Council can amend the decision that has been taken.
- 1.3 A call-in is simply the referral of a decision made, but not yet implemented, to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It is a key way of holding the Cabinet to account. A called-in decision cannot be implemented until it has been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which can examine the issue and question the decision maker on the reasons for the decision.
- 1.4 On 4 July 2023 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report that would be decided by the Cabinet on the following day. This was listed on the agenda as, Item 12 Customer Services Relocation Options.
- 1.5 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee made the following Comment on the report:

"The Overview & Scrutiny Committee expressed concerns about the increase in costs from those that were initially stated. The Committee requested that costs were kept closely under control for the duration of the project and reduced if possible and provided value for money. The Committee requested that further effort should be made in respect of the plans for the Pump Rooms Shop to ensure that the service provided to residents continued."
- 1.6 On 5 July 2023, the Cabinet met and made its decision on the report (see Appendix B to the report) as follows:
 - (1) That Cabinet approves the design concept for the Customer Service Centre as shown in Appendix 1 and 2 and delegates authority to the Head of Customer and Digital Services to approve minor design

- amendments, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Digital Services.
- (2) That Delegated Authority is provided to the Head of Customer and Digital Services to seek Listed Building and any other consents required to implement the proposals.
 - (3) That a budget of £410,000 is approved for the project, funded from the Corporate Asset Reserve.
 - (4) That subject to agreeing recommendations 1 to 3, officers continue their work to find an alternative venue or approach for the Pump Rooms shop.

The draft minutes for this item are set out at Appendix C to the report.

- 1.7 On 13 July 2023, Councillors Boad, Kohler and B Gifford requested a Call-In, under Council Procedure Rule E3, 21 Decisions of the Cabinet, for the following reasons:
- i) Cabinet did not have an analysis available to them of the various current or future customer needs, or projected volumes, ranging from dropping off or collecting documents, making complaints, to detailed housing and benefits or planning matters. Each of which require a different solution from a simple reception desk to rooms for confidential discussions.
 - ii) The budget had increased by £210,000 to £410,000 since February. No challenge was made by the Cabinet as to whether the proposal put forward was either an appropriate or affordable solution, or value for money for Council Tax payers.
 - iii) The removal of the shop selling local artists products located in the Pump Rooms next to the Art Gallery was a new proposal with no appropriate alternative solution available or how it would be staffed.
- 1.8 The call-in is in respect of the overall design and cost of the proposal and not the relocation of the services to the Pump Rooms that was considered and agreed by Cabinet in February under minute 87 Relocation of Office Accommodation and the Provision of Public Facing Access to Council Services as follows:
- “(6) a Customer Service Hub is created at the Royal Pump Rooms as a replacement and significant enhancement to the customer service provision currently operated at Riverside House, be agreed.”
- 1.9 The Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the call-in on 20 July 2023 and resolved that:

“The Committee referred the item to Council for further debate so that all Members can be given the opportunity to ask questions and fully understand the implications, and to provide the Council with assurance that it is providing a viable option.

The Committee asks for pertinent information, such as a breakdown of customer attendance at Riverside House reception, plans for rooms at the Town Hall, an update on shop location (confidentially if needed), timescales for the overall project to be circulated ahead of Council by way of an addendum.

The Committee notes that the move of the Customers Services team is not done in isolation, but it is part of a wider picture, with the plan to move the

Council offices out of Riverside House and the developments planned for the Town Hall. As such, the Committee asks that the relevant information from these different projects is brought forward ahead of the Council meeting.

The Committee also requested further details on what other options were considered as potential for relocating the Customer Services and reasons why these were discounted.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee asks that the issue of relocating the Pump Rooms shop should be considered by Council, asking that any confidential information be sent in advance to all Members, to inform the debate at Council, which should be carried in public session as much as possible, for the purpose of transparency and accountability.”

- 1.10 The Chairman of the Council has agreed to take this as an urgent item at its meeting on 26 July 2023, as this will negate the need for an additional meeting of Council and if needed recommendations made can be passed to the Cabinet on 2 August 2023.

2 Alternative Options

- 2.1 There is no requirement for alternative options because a call-in requires that a set procedure is followed.

3 Legal Implications

- 3.1 There are no specific areas of legislation that need to be considered in respect of this report.

4 Financial Services

- 4.1 There are no budgetary framework implications as a consequence of this report other than those reflected within the original Cabinet decision.

5 Business Strategy

- 5.1 Warwick District Council has adopted a Business Strategy which sets out key areas for service delivery, this report does not directly contribute to those themes.

6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 There are no direct environmental implications of the proposal in relation to the Council's policies and Climate Emergency Action Plan.

7 Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 7.1 There are no Equality Impact Assessment implications of this report and the details of those of the Cabinet decision are set out in the original report.

8 Data Protection

- 8.1 There are no data protection implications to the recommendations in the report.

9 Health and Wellbeing

- 9.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications of the proposal in this report.

10 Risk Assessment

- 10.1 There are no direct risks associated with this report other than those included within the original report.

11 Consultation

11.1 No consultation is required on this report.

Background papers: None

Supporting documents: None

21. Decisions of the Cabinet

- (a) This call-in procedure can apply to any decision taken by the Cabinet which is not a recommendation to Council. It will not apply to:
- a decision which has been defined as urgent under Council Procedure Rule 26;
 - a decision that has previously been called-in or is of the same subject matter of an item that has been called-in within the previous 6 months;
 - any decision relating to a non-executive function, whether taken by a Committee or an officer under delegated powers; and
 - a decision made by or is the responsibility of the Council.
- (b) Any decision taken by Cabinet shall be published on the Council's website, normally, within two working days of the decision being made. Notification of the publication of the decision will be sent to all Warwick District Councillors via email.
- (c) The decision will come into force and may then be implemented after 5.00pm on the expiry of the fifth working day after the date of electronic publication of the decision, unless the Monitoring Officer receives a written request as set out in (d) below.
- (d) If, before the expiry of the period referred to in (c) above, the Monitoring Officer receives a written request from at least three non-Cabinet members of the Council to call-in an Cabinet decision, setting out the nature of their concern and the reasons for the call-in, then the matter shall be treated as "called-in"
- (e) Any such request must provide a reason for the call-in. This should specify why the decision:
- is considered to be contrary to the normal requirements for decision-making; or
 - is considered to be contrary to the Council's agreed policy framework and/or budget; and/or
 - what further information needs to be provided by the Cabinet to explain why the decision was taken.
- (f) If an item is "called-in" the Monitoring Officer will notify all Councillors, the Corporate Management Team and relevant Head of Service(s) that the decision has been called-in.
- (g) Where it is cited that the decision is contrary to the Policy or Budget Framework the Monitoring Officer will consider this under Article 12 and will advise the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in the covering report for when they consider the called in item, that either:
- (i) the decision complies with Policy & Budgetary Framework; or
 - (ii) the decision does not comply with Policy & Budgetary Framework and therefore should be recommended to Council for consideration.

- (h) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee will meet to consider a report on the called-in item within 10 working days of the item being called-in. The Committee will decide to either:
 - (i) refer it back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, setting out in writing the nature of its concern; or
 - (ii) decide to take no action; or
 - (iii) refer the matter to Council for debate.
- (i) The outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee consideration will normally be published electronically within two working days of the meeting and all Councillors will be notified of this.
- (j) If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decide to take no action, the original decision shall take effect at 5.00pm on the expiry of the fifth working day from the date of publication of the outcome, unless a request has been made as set out at (k) below.
- (k) Any six non-Cabinet members of the Council may, by written notice to the Monitoring Officer before 5.00pm on the fifth working day after the date of publication of the outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting, require the decision (either refer to Cabinet or take no further actions) to be referred to a meeting of the Council. The Council will meet to consider the decision no later than 10 working days after the fifth working day following publication of the decision by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Any such request for a referral of the decision must set out the nature of the concern and the reasons for the referral.
- (l) Council will meet to consider the called-in item, that has been referred to them, within 10 working days of the item being referred to them. Council can determine:
 - (i) to take no action (If this is the case the decision can be implemented the next working day); or
 - (ii) refer the matter to the Cabinet for reconsideration setting out in writing the nature of its concerns; or
 - (ii) make the decision with or without amendment, if the Monitoring Officer has determined that it falls within the Council's power to do so. (If this is the case the decision can be implemented the next working day)
- (m) When the matter is referred back to the Cabinet the decision will be reconsidered at a meeting of the Cabinet no later than 10 working days after receipt of the matter was referred to them. The Cabinet will:
 - (i) Confirm the original decision – it then takes effect on the day after that reconsideration and cannot be called in, or
 - (ii) amend their original decision in anyway – in which case the decision can be subject to a further call in as detailed above.

Title: Customer Services Relocation Options
 Lead Officer: David Elkington (david.elkington@warwickdc.gov.uk)
 Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jessica Harrison
 Wards of the District directly affected: None

Approvals required	Date	Name
Portfolio Holder	16/06/23	Jessica Harrison
Finance	16/06/23	Andrew Rollins
Legal Services		
Chief Executive	16/06/23	Chris Elliott
Director of Climate Change	16/06/23	Dave Barber
Head of Service(s)	16/06/23	Phil Clarke Lisa Barker Tracy Dolphin Steve Partner Marianne Rolfe Graham Leach
Section 151 Officer	16/06/23	Andrew Rollins
Monitoring Officer	16/06/23	Andrew Jones
Leadership Co-ordination Group		
Final decision by this Committee or rec to another Cttee / Council?	Yes	
Contrary to Policy / Budget framework?	No	
Does this report contain exempt info/Confidential? If so, which paragraph(s)?	No	
Does this report relate to a key decision (referred to in the Cabinet Forward Plan)?	Yes, Forward Plan item – scheduled for (date)	
Accessibility Checked?	Yes	

Summary

This report provides further detail towards the proposals to relocate customer service operations to the Pump Rooms from the Council's current headquarters at Riverside House which is due to be sold. This follows the decision of Cabinet in February 2023.

Recommendation(s)

- (1) That Cabinet approves the design concept for the Customer Service Centre as shown in Appendix 1 and 2 and delegates authority to the Head of Customer and Digital Services to approve minor design amendments, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Digital Services
 - (2) That Delegated Authority is provided to the Head of Customer and Digital Services to seek Listed Building and any other consents required to implement the proposals.
 - (3) That a budget of £410,000 is approved for the project, funded from the Corporate Asset Reserve.
 - (4) That subject to agreeing recommendations 1 to 3, officers continue their work to find an alternative venue or approach for the Pump Rooms shop.
-

1 Reasons for the Recommendation

1.1 Riverside House

1.1.1 In September 2022, Cabinet considered a report which discussed the relocation of office accommodation and customer facing services away from their current home at Riverside House.

1.1.2 Key recommendations, pertinent to this report are that Cabinet:

- noted the major contribution a move from Riverside House could make the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- agreed to a two-stage approach to office relocation - stage 1 involving a move to other parts of the Council's estate or alternative locations, and stage 2, a permanent move to long-term office accommodation.
- agreed that public access to a face-to-face Council enquiry service should be based in or close to Leamington town centre and does not need to be near the "back-office"; and

1.1.3 With some 60,000ft² of office accommodation and 194 car parking spaces, Riverside House has been home to many of the Council's back-office operations and front facing customer services since its purchase in the year 2000. Prior to the pandemic, around 350 staff occupied Riverside House daily, as their primary work location.

1.1.4 However, even at its pre-pandemic peak, it was evident that Riverside House was far larger than the Council needed. This led to a proposal to relocate the Council's offices to new, purpose-built facilities at Covent Garden. This proposal was however discontinued in 2019 and the Council remained at Riverside House.

1.1.5 The COVID pandemic in 2020 necessitated a radical change to working practices and most staff were mandated to work from home. As lockdown restrictions eased some staff returned to the office, but daily usage remained

significantly lower than its pre-pandemic highs. Around 40 to 50 staff presently use Riverside House on an average day and in 2022, this number peaked at 70, on just one occasion.

- 1.1.6 Public facing customer services resumed at Riverside House in late 2021 following their closure during lockdown. The prolonged impact of COVID however encouraged many of the Council's residents to use alternative means of communication and the number of customers using Riverside House also remained lower than in pre-pandemic times. Currently there is a relatively stable demand of around 50 customer visits per day.



Figure 1. The Interior of Riverside House

Customer Service facilities at Riverside House have not seen any significant updates for a long time. They do not meet the requirements of a modern customer service location.

- 1.1.7 The facilities available for customers at Riverside House are significantly dated, as shown in figure 1. Most of the facilities have not changed in more than two decades and in addition to being vastly oversized, also fail to create a welcoming and friendly customer service environment. The glass partitions which separate staff from customers for example are now rarely seen outside of banks, whilst the waiting area is harsh and does not provide privacy.
- 1.1.8 In February 2023, Cabinet considered and agreed a further report, discussing the relocation of office accommodation and the provision of public facing services. Key recommendations of relevance to this report include:
- That the Council lease office space at Saltisford One;
 - Ground floor space at the Town Hall as part of the office relocation strategy; and
 - A Customer Service hub is established at the Royal Pump Rooms.

- 1.1.9 The report identified that significant, year on year savings could be made if the Council moved out of Riverside House. This supported the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) assumption that savings of £250,000 per year could be achieved on the running costs of office accommodation from 2023/24 onwards.
- 1.1.10 Members should therefore note at this point that the Council's current underlying revenue deficit is still £1.5m despite this assumption and so the savings to be realised by leaving Riverside House are important to the Council's overall financial strategy.
- 1.1.11 Following the September 2022 Cabinet report work also began to dispose of Riverside House. The capital receipt from the sale was intended to fund other projects of significant community benefit, and a task group was setup to achieve this. An interested party was found in late 2022 and this was also agreed by Cabinet as a confidential item in February 2023.
- 1.1.12 The relocation of customer services is essential to the move from Riverside House and the February Cabinet report presented three broad choices:
- An empty shop within the town centre;
 - Space within the Town Hall; or
 - Space within the Pump Rooms.
- 1.1.13 The report's recommendations were accepted by Cabinet, noted by Council and were considered by Overview and Scrutiny in March 2023.
- 1.1.14 The Cabinet report recommended that the best potential location for a customer service facility was at the Pump Rooms, within the area currently occupied by the shop. The report noted that this would lead to the potential relocation of shop activities across other spaces within the Pump Rooms or the abandonment of the shop entirely if this was not possible.
- 1.1.15 Following the initial approval, work has been undertaken by officers of the Assets, Customer and Digital Services and Arts teams to develop the proposals and understand the implications further, including costs which were only estimated within the original report.
- 1.1.16 Work is on track to move office staff from Riverside House, but currently Customer Services have nowhere to go. Work on the Pump Rooms has not yet commenced and this is discussed further in 1.6.

1.2 **Public Concerns Post Decision**

- 1.2.1 In the days following the Cabinet decision, a small number of artists who sold their works in the shop reached out to both officers and Councillors to express their significant concerns about the potential closure and reuse of the shop space. They expressed that the shop provided a unique outlet for their works in a culturally significant building that could not be easily replaced.
- 1.2.2 The Leamington Society also expressed their concerns and in February 2023, put forward a bleak perspective on the decision in their newsletter. It noted that the move would...

"deprive local artists and authors, the Leamington History Group and the Leamington Society of opportunities to sell arts and crafts, cards, guides, books and prints" and that "A separate entry may be needed to separate the homeless and other anxious and worried people from the general public: locals, tourists, children, mother and baby groups, coming to

enjoy the Museum, the Library, the Café and so on.”

(Leamington Society, 2023)

- 1.2.3 An online petition, Hands off our Pump Rooms was also opened to capture public opinion. The petition stated that...

"The Pump Room is not the right place for the public face of WDC Housing Department and the Homelessness Officer and 'temporary' solutions may become permanent."

(HooPR, 2023)

- 1.2.4 Before closing, the petition received 1074 signatures. Some of those signing the petition offered comment on their reasons for doing so, and several key themes emerged. These are discussed in section 1.3. At the time of writing, the petition remained online and a link to the comments is provided in the Supporting Documents section.
- 1.2.5 In response public feedback, Cllr. Day, the then Leader of the Council, stated that Councillors would have the opportunity to look at any plans for the relocation as soon as they were available and have a final say on the detailed proposals. This report provides that information, for Cabinet to consider the proposals in more detail.

1.3 **Addressing the Petition Concerns**

- 1.3.1 Whilst it is not possible to address all the concerns raised by the petition's signatories, several individuals commented with similar concerns.

- 1.3.2 *The space should not be used for offices.*

There was significant concern that the Pump Rooms were going to be converted into offices and used to generically house Council staff. Several people also commented that this was not appropriate use of an historically significant and culturally important public building.

This concern whilst understandable, would however appear to be a misunderstanding of the Council's intent.

The Pump Rooms are not intended to be used as general office space as this would indeed be inappropriate for a building of such importance. A small space behind the existing shop will however be used to accommodate up to four people, but this space already used as an office, and it is not publicly accessible.

Photos of this space are shown in Figure 2 and further details are included in section 1.4.

- 1.3.3 *Homeless and housing services would be better served elsewhere:*

Both the petition's description and some signatories were concerned that the site would only be used to provide homeless and housing support services. There were also comments that the types of customers this would bring to the Pump Rooms would be undesirable and detrimental to the existing uses. Whilst this commentary is unedifying, it would again appear that there is a misunderstanding of intent.

The Customer Service centre would not solely offer housing and homeless services. A small, dedicated, multidisciplinary customer services team would staff the location and facilitate in-person access to all Council Services. Housing and Homeless advice would be available, but it would not be their sole service.

The original proposals included provisions for a dedicated Homelessness officer to be stationed with Customer Services at the Pump Rooms during operational hours. Homeless services generally require the expert knowledge of a specialist officer, who can assist with all aspects of their customer's needs. This provision was therefore purely to ensure any customers requiring assistance could be dealt with efficiently and effectively. This provision will be kept under review as the service capabilities develop.

It should also be noted, that one of Warwick District Council's core values is Fairness and Equality; we will value all citizens and work without bias or prejudice. We will always do the best that we can to serve our customers and provide an environment that is welcoming to all.

1.3.4 *The offer would detract from the building's cultural status:*

Many comments were concerned that the Customer Service offer would be incompatible with the cultural nature of the site and its predominant use as an arts and culture facility. Concerns were also raised that the existing tourist information service would be lost and that access to services such as tickets for the Spa Centre would be removed. This is not the case.

The library, art gallery and museum are amongst a very small group of publicly accessible spaces which customers can visit without any expectation of having to purchase something or pay a fee. This is an extremely important provision, especially now during the current cost of living crisis.

The Customer Service offer could compliment the buildings cultural status and bring the centre to the attention of a different group of patrons, who may not otherwise be visited or realised that such excellent facilities were available.

The Pump Rooms internal facilities are complimented further by the large and welcoming public spaces just outside the building's walls. All these factors contribute toward the Pump Rooms being an excellent site to offer meaningful public services that go beyond the current offer, without detracting from them.

1.3.5 *There would be a negative impact on existing amenities:*

Multiple signatories expressed concerns about the effectiveness and privacy of dealing with customers in the reception space and that some customer queries may make the overall atmosphere of the Pump Rooms less desirable.

There would again appear to be a misunderstanding of how Customer queries may be handled and where customers would be seen.

The Customer Service facilities at the Pump Rooms will be built to a high standard, suitably partitioned from the main foyer and not directly intermingled with the current operations. The Customer Service function will also not impede the existing reception, library, café, gallery or museum facilities and the services currently offered by Arts and Culture staff (such as tourist advice) will also continue, unaffected.

The site will be sufficiently staffed to ensure customers are seen efficiently, in a welcoming and friendly environment, which all our residents and communities deserve. No customer queries will be dealt with in an open space and will instead be directed to dedicated, customer service pods. Our customers dignity and privacy are very important and have been prioritised within our designs.

As described in section 1.6, the proposals will impact on the shop, but this is

the only significantly negative outcome.

1.3.6 *Public services belong in the Town Hall:*

Many of the signatories expressed that the Council's services would be better located at the Town Hall or that this was a "natural home" for operations.

Whilst historically a limited number of Council services were offered from the Town Hall, it has never been the centre of Council Services.

It is important to differentiate between the Council's office-based operations and front-line services. The inclusion of a different type of public service at the Pump Rooms as previously discussed, has the potential to significantly benefit Warwick District residents, businesses and visitors.

It should not be assumed that an alternative location would be better for those front-line services, purely based on historical usage or association. Moving services to the Town Hall would be more complex than the current Pump Room proposals and this is considered further in section 2.

1.4 **The Pump Rooms Proposals**

1.4.1 Officers from Customer and Digital Services, the Assets Team and the Arts team have been working with professional design company, Atkins, to draw up proposals for how the Pump Rooms Customer Service centre could be developed. Full details of the proposals are included in Appendix 1 and 2.

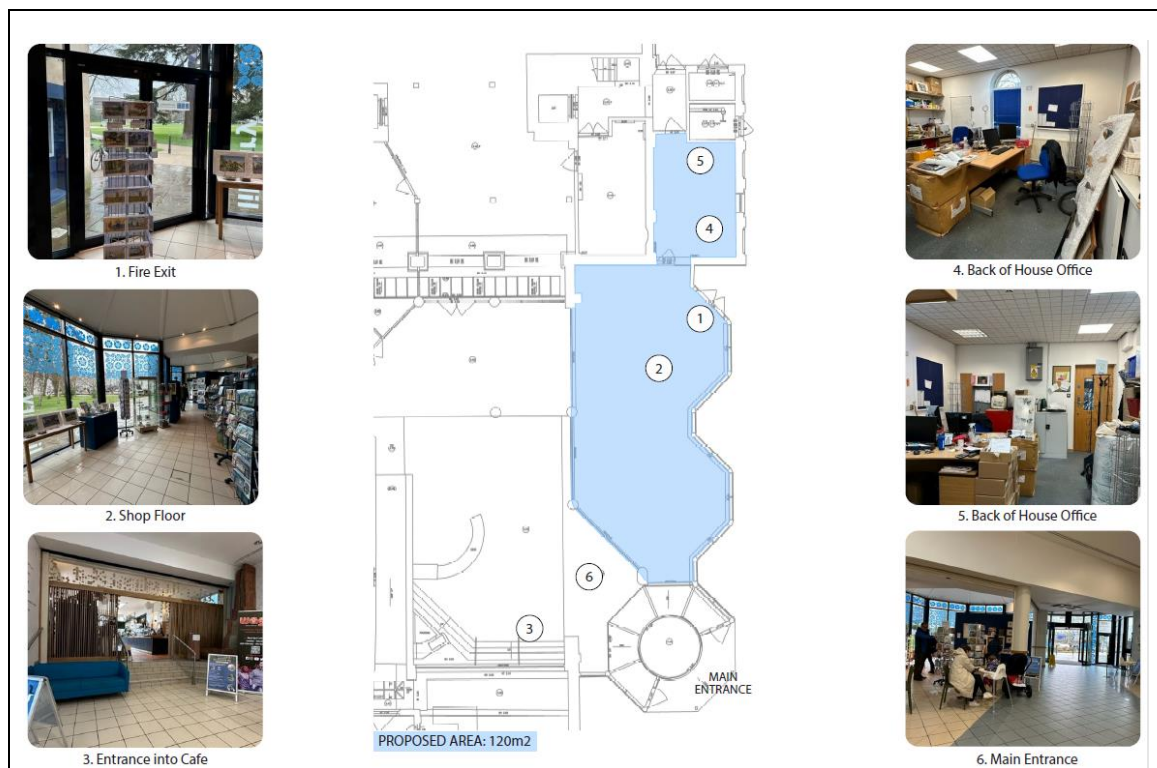


Figure 2 – Space Proposals

The space currently occupied by the shop and the office behind it are proposed for conversion to a Customer Services site.

1.4.2 Work commenced by evaluating the spaces available to see if there were any alternatives to using the shop location. The most promising of these was to use an area within the main foyer but this option provided no effective way

of building dedicated space or creating privacy for customers.

- 1.4.3 Any changes to the main foyer would also have permanently ended its use as a meeting space for ad-hoc events (which was raised as a concern within the public petition) and would have significantly impacted on customers accessing the library, toilets, café, museum and gallery. As such, this was not considered viable.
- 1.4.4 Other areas of the Pump Rooms were also considered, such as space within the library but it became clear very quickly that such proposals would significantly impact on the existing amenities and would not be acceptable. As such, it was concluded that space currently occupied by the shop remained the most suitable available. This is shown in Figure 2.
- 1.4.5 The shop space offers the potential to create an excellent Customer service facility for our residents, business and visitors. The space could offer three private meeting booths for customers, a small reception area to direct customer flow, a waiting area, independent entrance, booths for video or telephone calls and a small office to accommodate customer services staff. Figure 3. shows the overall layout of the proposed facilities.



Figure 3. The Proposed Customer Service Centre Layout.

A larger version of this image is included in Appendix 2 – Design Concept.

1.5 Impact on the Shop

- 1.5.1 The proposals outlined would unfortunately result in the closure of the shop.
- 1.5.2 During the design phase, work was undertaken to try and identify an alternative method of operating the shop, which included:
- Relocating to the Town Hall

- Relocating stock within the Pump Rooms
- Provisions at an alternative location

- 1.5.3 A space does potentially exist within the Town Hall where the shop could be relocated, but this is smaller in size and does not benefit from the footfall of passing trade. Equally, with significant work planned as part of the Council's Future High Street funding, it would not be possible to relocate the shop to the site for some time. However, this location could be very effective once the Creative Hub construction is completed.
- 1.5.4 Discussions were also held with an alternative gallery provider to investigate the potential of relocating artists' work. Unfortunately, the gallery confirmed that they were not able to pursue the idea at this time. Alternative space within the Pump Rooms also proved impossible to find in any meaningful way other than for the sale of the smallest items in low volumes.
- 1.5.5 Closing the Pump Rooms shop would directly impact on 20 artists who regularly sell their works at the site. This is a significant consideration as whilst we are under no obligation to provide an outlet, we have no alternative to offer, and this change will impact on their livelihoods.
- 1.5.6 It is estimated that the shop generates around £50,000 to £60,000 of income each year as the Council charges artists a commission for selling their works. This income would also no longer be received.
- 1.5.7 Owing to the significant issues closing the Pump Rooms shop may cause the artists who currently use the facility, it is recommended that the Council continues to work on trying to find an alternative location or means of selling their works. Whilst there can be no guarantee of a successful conclusion, every option should be investigated, and can be discussed with the Portfolio Holders for Customer and Digital Services and Arts and Economy the earliest opportunity.
- 1.5.8 This additional project however, should not delay the recommended works to the Pump Room facilities, which need begin as soon as possible.

1.6 **Impact on the Wider Relocation**

- 1.6.1 Work is currently moving at pace to relocate services from Riverside House to space at a County Council owned building in Warwick (Saltisford One). Customer Services will already be one of the last services to move out of Riverside House as no matter what decision is made by Cabinet, preparing new facilities will take time.
- 1.6.2 The impact of keeping Customer Services at Riverside House for any prolonged period include:
- Approximately £50,000 costs for every month Riverside House is kept in use whilst Saltisford One is operational.
 - The building will have no other staff, but will still require power and (potentially) heating to be provided to much wider areas.
 - All regular operations such as electrical safety and maintenance works will need to continue whilst customer services remain on site.
 - The site cannot be sold until vacated.
 - The Council will remain liable for all business rates until the site is sold.

- ICT will have to maintain connectivity to the site, preventing the decommissioning of legacy equipment and links.

1.6.3 Overall, it is very important that a decision to support the relocation of customer services is made promptly, so that necessary works may commence. It is anticipated that work to complete the Customer Service facilities at the Pump Rooms could take six months, if there are no significant difficulties such as planning complications or issues sourcing materials.

1.7 **Conclusion**

1.7.1 The overall recommendation is to ask Cabinet to confirm the development of the Pump Rooms based on the design proposals discussed. The reasons for this include:

- There is the potential to create an excellent customer service environment in an open, welcoming space;
- The site will be fully accessible and provides significantly upgraded facilities to those currently available at Riverside House;
- The site is within an existing Council building and will not incur additional revenue costs such as rent or business rates;
- The proposed design will enhance the Pump Room environment and compliment the services already present;
- The services will not impact on the library, café, gallery, museum or tourist information operations;
- The site will co-locate multiple public services, potentially promoting use of the library and gallery.
- Existing on-site Warwickshire County Council infrastructure could make any future co-location of customer service personnel very easy.
- The site is easily reachable by both public and private transport. Nearby parking is also available for customers with mobility issues.

2 **Alternative Options**

2.1 When considering the ongoing relocation of Customer Services, two further options were previously appraised.

2.2 *Relocate to the Town Hall*

2.2.1 The February Cabinet report considered relocating Customer Services to the Town Hall as an option. Following the increased public interest in the Pump Room proposals, officers continued to investigate this alternative option.

2.2.2 The only potential location within the Town Hall is shown in Figure 4. This area is currently occupied by the University. The space is intended to be used as office and meeting accommodation upon the University's vacation, but it could be repurposed to provide a customer service option.

2.2.3 The site is on the ground floor of the Town Hall and potentially has its own entrance (although this may require planning permission to use). The space would also need to remain reachable from the main entrance, as there is no accommodation for any users with mobility issues using the side entrance.

2.2.4 As can be seen on the plan, in comparison to the Pump Rooms, this site has several disadvantages, most notably its shape and layout.

2.2.5 Customer Service functions would have to be split across two rooms. At

approximately 57m² each, neither is big enough to accommodate the entire service on its own and even in tandem, space will be limited. This layout will provide a disjointed customer journey – akin to that experienced where a customer waits in one area and is then led to another. This is not the kind of experience we desire our customers to have.

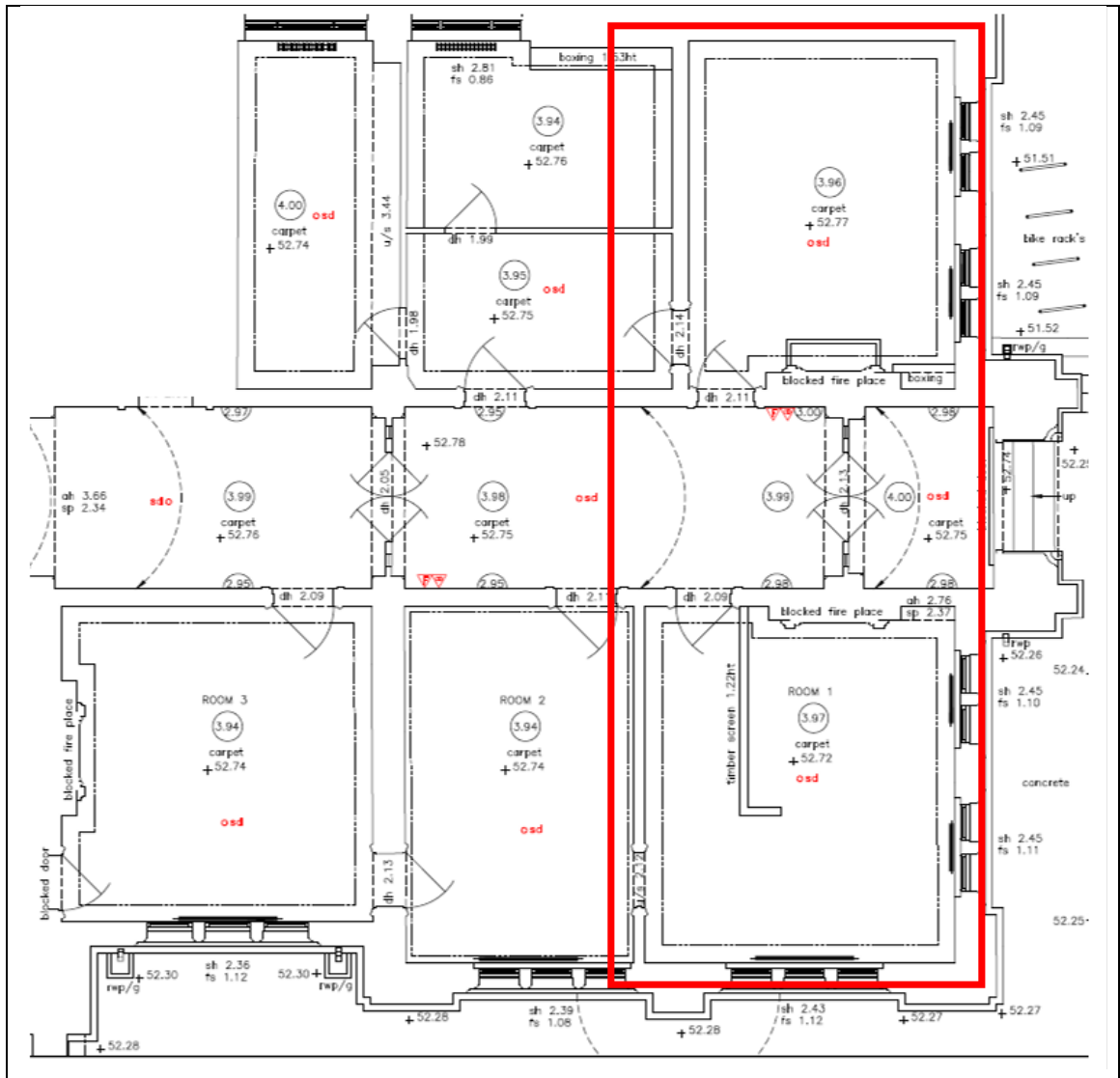


Figure 4 – Town Hall Site

The two rooms indicated could potentially be used for a Customer Service function. However this would result in a disjointed customer offering, inferior to that which can be created at the Pump Rooms.

- 2.2.6 To convert the rooms into one would require significant structural work and listed building consent. Modifications would materially alter the building with significant consequence and costs would also likely be far more than those incurred to convert the Pump Rooms. This would predominantly be due to the volume of building work required.
- 2.2.7 Reception facilities would also have to be slotted into an existing corridor layout and the whole progression of a customer’s journey would not be smooth. The quality of experience for our residents would be substantially diminished and they would not benefit from the potential hub experience of having many public amenities located in proximity.

- 2.2.8 It should also be noted that the Town Hall already has significant funding allocated to complete works under the Future High Street fund. The establishment of a Creative Hub was a significant factor in securing funding and the concerns noted in the original proposal to cabinet remain valid.
- 2.3 *Rent and Convert a Shop Unit*
- 2.3.1 Consideration was given in the original cabinet proposals to renting a town centre shop unit and converting it to meet customer service needs. The option was revisited as part of developing this proposal, to reassess if there were any potential benefits. It was originally anticipated that overall, this could have been an easier option.
- 2.3.2 Converting a town centre shop does have several positive qualities. It would not have any impact on the Pump Rooms or Town Hall, would fill a vacant town centre unit long term and potentially provide additional space for other staff to co-locate. There would likely be fewer planning considerations if the site already had appropriate planning permission and the preparation of the premises would not disrupt any existing operations or future work. Town centre sites were also likely to benefit from similarly good transport links.
- 2.3.3 A major drawback however, is that a shop would also incur significant additional costs. For example, 36 The Parade recently became available (as at 16/06/2023) to let and would be an ideal site. The unit incurs an annual rental cost of £70,000 with a rateable value of £58,500. This excludes service charges such as electricity and gas, and would also require connectivity to the Council's network, security preparations, and safety servicing (such as electrical and gas compliance).
- 2.3.4 Another property at 74 The Parade was similarly priced at £50,000 per year, with a rateable value of £57,500, again excluding all service costs.
- 2.3.5 There are lower cost alternative units available but in general, these are not of a suitable size. 64c Regent Street for example is available for £25,000 per year but has a floor space of just 53m². The current customer service centre at Riverside House occupies approximately 330m² and whilst this is significantly larger than required, at least 110m² is likely to be needed. 36 The Parade is approximately 148m² and 74 The Parade just 104m².
- 2.3.6 Overall, the renting of a shop was not considered as a realistic long-term option. It would incur continual revenue costs for the Council and these would likely increase as time goes by. Even if the Pump Rooms shop remained open, the revenues it generates each year, would not be sufficient to offset the costs of renting a shop of the size required.
- 2.3.7 Links to the respective listings are included in the Supporting Documents section, but please be aware that these are not permanent links and may not be available in the future.

3 Legal Implications

- 3.1 Some of the proposed changes to the Pump Rooms will require Listed Building Consent. If accepted, an appropriate application will be submitted in a timely manner for works to be commenced.

4 Financial Services

- 4.1 The conversion of the Pump Rooms will have a significant financial cost. The original proposals anticipated that this would be in the region of £200,000. Budget for the conversion however was only included for £120,000.

- 4.2 Having worked with our contractors to develop the proposals, the estimated costs are now between £380,000 and £410,000 and are made up as follows:
- Building Works and Contractor Costs £315,000
 - Professional Fees £65,000
 - Contingency, planning fees, inflationary costs (c. 10%) £30,000
- 4.3 It is important to note that many of the costs associated with the proposal would be incurred regardless of site and the current budget of £120,000 will not be sufficient even if the Pump Rooms was not taken forward.
- 4.4 The costs are for capital works and would not represent an ongoing expense. Funding for the additional costs could be met from the Corporate Asset Reserve.
- 4.5 Customer and Digital Services, along with the Assets team would also look to undertake a value engineering exercise as the project commences. Wherever possible, we would look for alternative, lower cost options that would not diminish the overall customer service offer or build quality, but would save the Council money.
- 4.6 For example, instead of buying entirely new furniture for the office behind the customer service centre, we could reuse the best of what is currently available at Riverside House. When looking at proposed furniture items such as the meeting booths, consideration will be given to the exact model we choose, as these can range from £15,000 to more than £50,000.
- 4.7 Whilst it is not expected that value engineering would bring the overall costs down to the original budget, it may be possible to avoid spending some of the anticipated budget.
- 4.8 The additional costs would of course impact on the financial benefits of the overall office move. However, the additional costs are not sufficient to undermine the overall business case, which will still return significant revenue savings for the Council on an ongoing basis.

5 Business Strategy

- 5.1 The Pump Room Proposals will make a positive contribution towards the Council's Business Strategy Objectives.
- 5.2 *Health, Homes, Communities*
- 5.2.1 The proposals will create a new, well-designed, high-quality customer service environment for our customers to access face to face services. Accessing this at the Pump Rooms as previously discussed may also open and make accessible the other services present on site, which our customers may not have previously accessed.
- 5.3 *Effective Staff*
- 5.3.1 The relocation of services to the Pump Rooms will provide customer service staff with a welcome opportunity to work in a modern facility that they can be proud of. The site will also facilitate them working in different ways and enabling them to provide a more personable service that is dynamic and responsive to customer needs. This simply isn't possible at Riverside House.
- 5.4 *Maintain or Improve Services*

- 5.4.1 As outlined in previous sections, the creation of a Customer Service hub at the Pump Rooms has significant potential to improve our face-to-face service offer.

6 Environmental/Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 Advice from our developers has highlighted that any changes made to the facility, particularly regarding heating and ventilation, must have a positive overall impact on the carbon footprint of the building. In combination with the Pump Rooms Roof replacement, it is anticipated that the two projects will positively impact on the facilities energy efficiency.
- 6.2 It should also be noted, that by including the facilities in an existing Council premise, we will not be growing the Council's carbon footprint as we would by adding a new building.

7 Analysis of the effects on Equality

- 7.1 An equality impact assessment is included in Appendix 3. Overall, the anticipated impact is positive.

8 Data Protection

- 8.1 The proposals do not have a data protection implication.

9 Health and Wellbeing

- 9.1 The proposals do not have quantifiable Health and Wellbeing implications.

10 Risk Assessment

- 10.1 A risk assessment summary is included in Appendix 4.

11 Consultation

- 11.1 Consultation has been undertaken with the Portfolio Holder for Customer and Digital Services.

12 Background Papers

- 12.1 Office Accommodation Strategy and the Provision of Public Facing Access to Council Services, WDC Cabinet, 29th September 2022. [Available Online](#).
- 12.2 Relocation of Office Accommodation and the Provision of Public Facing Access to Council Services, WDC Cabinet, 9th February 2023. [Available Online](#).
- 12.3 Summary of Decisions, WDC Council, 27th February 2023. [Available Online](#).
- 12.4 Overview and Scrutiny, WDC, 7th March 2023. [Available Online](#).

13 Supporting Documents

- 13.1 Hands off our Pump Rooms, Change.org, February 2023. [Available Online](#) (accessed 25/05/2023).
- 13.2 Right Move, 36 The Parade Property Details. [Available Online](#) (accessed 16/06/2023)
- 13.3 Right Move, 74 The Parade Property Details. [Available Online](#) (accessed 16/06/2023)
- 13.4 Right Move, 64c Regent Street Property Details. [Available Online](#) (accessed 16/06/2023)
- 13.5 Leamington Society Newsletter, Marianne Pitts, February 2023. [Available Online](#) (accessed 25/05/2023)