

		Executive 4 <sup>th</sup> February 2009	Agenda Item No.
<b>Title</b>		Customer Access at Riverside House	
<b>For further information about this report please contact</b>		Andrew Jones	
<b>Service Area</b>		Revenues and Customer Services	
<b>Wards of the District directly affected</b>		All	
<b>Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006</b>		No	
<b>Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number</b>		N/A	
<b>Background Papers</b>			

<b>Contrary to the policy framework:</b>	Yes/No
<b>Contrary to the budgetary framework:</b>	Yes/No
<b>Key Decision?</b>	Yes/No
<b>Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)</b>	Yes/No

<b>Officer/Councillor Approval</b>		
With regard to officer approval all reports <u>must</u> be approved by the report author's relevant director, Finance, Legal Services and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).		
<b>Officer Approval</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>
Relevant Director	19/01/09	Bill Hunt
Chief Executive	19/01/09	Chris Elliott
CMT	19/01/09	All
Section 151 Officer	19/01/09	Mary Hawkins
Legal	16/01/09	Peter Oliver
Finance	16/01/09	Melanie Gillman
Portfolio Holder(s)	19/01/09	Cllr Les Caborn
<b>Consultation Undertaken</b>		
Please insert details of any consultation undertaken with regard to this report. Warwickshire County Council Voluntary Sector		
<b>Final Decision?</b>		Yes/No
<b>Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)</b>		

## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The report requests member approval for officers to develop a business case for the redevelopment of the customer reception points at Riverside House. Preliminary work has suggested that there are significant revenue savings and customer service improvements to be gained from developing a One Stop Shop at Riverside House. There is already funding within the capital budget for building changes and any design will need to take account of the allocated budget.
- 1.2 The potential savings are predicated on the Customer Service Centre remaining at Riverside House. The plans to relocate the Customer Service Centre to Shire Hall have encountered technology difficulties which may require additional funding to resolve. Given the Council's decision to relocate only if there is no additional cost, it is sensible to examine the customer service operation at Riverside House in its entirety.

## **2. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 Members agree that a business case for a One Stop Shop at Riverside House is developed in time for the June Executive and that the plans to move customer service points to The Royal Pump Rooms are discontinued.
- 2.2 Members agree that the relocation of the Customer Service Centre to Shire Hall should not take place until a business case for a Riverside House One Stop Shop has been considered.

## **3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 The council undertook a Best Value Review of customer access in 2003/2004 and the vast majority of the recommendations have been implemented: The council has introduced a customer service centre; significantly enhanced the website; expanded the payment channels available to customers; centralised the processing of post in and out; and opened a number of One Stop Shops.
- 3.2 The remaining action was to move the reception points for the majority of Riverside House customer enquiries to The Royal Pump Rooms. Unfortunately due to factors outside the Council's control, this project met with significant delays and an agreement could not be reached with the county council on the space requirements to deliver the enquiry service.
- 3.3 Officers still consider that a One Stop Shop approach to customer enquiries is the way forward and the success of Kenilworth, Whitnash and Warwick One Stop Shops demonstrates this. Therefore officers would like to examine the case for a One Stop Shop at Riverside House.
- 3.4 The proposed feasibility study comes at an apposite time as there is an opportunity to explore whether the recently closed Post Office in Milverton could be re-opened in Riverside House. The obstacles to achieving this are significant, however, the success of the relocated Warwick Post Office into Shire Hall suggest that this option must at least be examined.
- 3.5 Initial work indicates that there may be an opportunity for the Council to realise significant savings by making more flexible use of customer service staff based at Riverside House. This would mean that some counter staff would take on phone

duties where demand allows and vice-versa. However, this would not be possible if the Customer Service Centre was to move to Shire Hall. It is therefore recommended that this project is put on hold until a business case for a One Stop Shop at Riverside House has been developed.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 Having concluded that the space requirements at The Royal Pump Rooms were not going to be agreed by all the partners, there was the option to do nothing and retain the current customer enquiry points at Riverside House. This approach does not allow the residents of Leamington to benefit from the One Stop Shop facility enjoyed by other parts of the district. It also makes the opportunity of realising revenue savings more difficult as enabling staff to work generically will not be as practical.

#### **5. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK**

- 5.1 The remaining capital for the OSS programme is approximately £180,000. There is also the likelihood of being able to access £70,000 from the Building on Excellence programme which was earmarked specifically for Riverside House changes. Therefore the budget for any project would be in the region of £250,000. Initial discussions with designers have indicated that such a budget would be adequate for the development of a One Stop Shop.
- 5.2 It is anticipated that annual savings of £50,000 can be generated from a more creative use of staffing at Riverside House. However, these savings can only be realised if the design of the reception points is changed and the Customer Service Centre remains at Riverside House.

#### **6. POLICY FRAMEWORK**

- 6.1 The Council has an objective of increasing the ease of access to services for customers. The One Stop Shop programme has been successful in increasing the number of customers who are able to access council services in their locality.
- 6.2 A corporate strategy target is to increase the number of multi-agency One Stop Shops from 1 in 2007 to 5 in 2011. There will shortly be the opening of a fourth One Stop Shop in the district based in Lillington Library and Riverside House, Leamington would be the fifth.

#### **7. BACKGROUND**

- 7.1 The development of a One Stop Shop at The Royal Pump Rooms would have seen the conclusion of an ambitious programme of creating One Stop Shops in five areas of the district. The Leamington One Stop Shop was always going to be the most demanding and the issue had been examined many times over the years. Despite many hours of work, the partners involved have been unable to agree on a design for The Pump Rooms and so reluctantly officers are recommending that this proposal is discontinued.
- 7.2 That said it is still a corporate strategy target to develop five One Stop Shops by 2011 and officers consider that this can be achieved by basing Leamington's One Stop Shop at Riverside House. Members will be pleased to learn that despite the failure to agree a layout at The Pump Rooms, the County Council is still keen to be

part of a One Stop Shop in Leamington. The County Council already has its Registrars Service at Riverside House so there is an immediate opportunity to improve customer service by moving to a unified reception point. Furthermore the County is keen to deliver from Leamington all the services currently delivered at the other One Stop Shops.

- 7.3 There is also the opportunity to examine whether it would be feasible to re-open a Milverton, Post Office, this time based in Riverside House. Although there are many matters to be considered with such a venture, officers consider that the issue requires investigation.
- 7.4 From a customer's perspective there are significant advantages to Riverside House: It has significant parking, a spacious reception area and the majority of officers are based at the same location.
- 7.5 The Executive has given its "in principle" agreement that the Customer Service Centre should relocate to Shire Hall. However, following member concerns about changing the Council's phone number to a 0845 line, officers were asked to examine whether there were any alternative options.
- 7.6 The investigation into alternatives suggests that it may be possible to retain a 01926 number but that there may be some telephone infrastructure changes and associated revenue costs.
- 7.7 Given the Executive's desire to see the relocation to Shire Hall as cost neutral, it is appropriate to consider whether the current economic conditions mean that the project should be re-considered and examine customer service provision at Riverside House in general.