

**Response from the meeting of Warwick District Council on the O&S
Committee's Comments – 26 July 2023**

Urgent Item – Call-in of Cabinet Decision 5 July 2023 – Customer Services Relocations
Options

Background:

1. 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.

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."
2. On 5 July 2023, the Cabinet met and made its decision on 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.
3. 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.

4. 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.”
5. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered the call-in on 20 July 2023.

Scrutiny Comment 20 July 2023:

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.

Council Response 26 July 2023:

Council noted the Call-in procedure for Warwick District Council as set out in Appendix A to the report that was presented to it.

That in respect of the resolutions made by Cabinet on the Customer Services Relocations Options, the Council resolved to take no action. (This meant that the decision could be implemented the next working day.)