

Report of: Ian Barrett, Business Manager, Customer Services

To: Executive Board

Date: 29th January 2007

Item No:

Title of Report : Consultation Paper on Face to Face services

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To provide Executive Board with details of consultation paper focused on the future provision by the Council of face-to-face access to services and to provide a report on feedback from consultees.

Key decision: No

Portfolio Holder: Cllr David Rundle

Scrutiny Responsibility: Community

Ward(s) affected: Cowley, Cowley Marsh, Lye Valley, Blackbird Leys, Littlemore, Northfield Brook, Rose Hill and Iffley.

Report Approved by

Portfolio Holder: Councillor David Rundle

Legal: Jeremy Franklin

Finance: Christopher Kaye

Strategic Director: Michael Lawrence

Policy Framework: Improving the Council's performance, Working with others to develop and deliver shared goals, Customer Contact Strategy

Recommendation(s): Executive Board is asked to comment on the consultation paper and:

1. Agree to maintain and extend the current commitment to face to face service delivery
2. Confirm that the Cowley Centre is an appropriate site for a Local Council office
3. Confirm that bids for the initial set up costs and annual running costs for such an office be submitted for consideration in the 2007/8 budget setting

process.

4. Agree that the future provision of a City centre facility be concluded out of the negotiations with the developers of the St Aldates Chambers site.

Background

1. The Council is seeking views on the future provision of face-to-face services and the attached consultation paper has been produced for area committees and residents to consider.

2. As an introduction to the paper Councillor David Rundle, as portfolio holder, has issued the following covering note:

“With this covering note comes a consultation paper on how the City Council can best provide services to the people of Oxford face-to-face. With the internet and telephones, there are a variety of ways of contacting the Council, but we also realise that being available face-to-face is important to many people. That’s why we want your views.

In particular, we are looking for the best way to be present in the local communities, always recognising the limits on our resources. In this paper, there is a proposal to have a visible presence in Cowley Centre where people from all over the south-east of the city could find a convenient place to access our services. We hope that, if this were to happen, other partner organisations, like the County Council, would come on board so that it really would be a ‘one-stop shop.’ But, before we make any decisions on this, we want to know whether you and the residents you represent would welcome such an initiative. So, please do give us full feedback. I thank you for your involvement and look forward to hearing your views.”

Cllr David Rundle

3. The paper (Appendix 1) recommends that we maintain and extend the current commitment.

4. As part of the Council’s current strategy to provide a presence in locations where they are most needed, the paper also considers a proposal to open a Council office in the Cowley Centre, Templars Square.

The reasoning behind this is that:

- It’s convenient and accessible to several areas where there is a high demand for Council Services
- It has good transport links
- It’s a place where our customers go anyway for other purposes
- It’s an ideal location for the choice based lettings scheme
- It would have potential for services provided by other agencies such as the County Council or the Department of Works and Pensions

- It would replace the existing Blackbird Leys site that continues to be very popular, but where the lease and planning permission are coming to an end and the structure of the temporary building that has been there for 20 years is becoming unserviceable.

5. It should be emphasised that this site would be regarded as a pilot for the future to further extend and demonstrate the provision of a broad range of “joined up” face-to-face services and we would be seeking additional partner organisations to participate in this.

6. The paper also considers the provision of City centre face to face contact and recommends that this be decided following the conclusion of negotiations relating to the future of St Aldate’s Chambers.

Consultation results

7. The paper has been considered by The Oxford Tenants Panel, Cowley Area Committee, South East Area Committee and the Housing Advisory Board.

8. All supported the continued commitment to face-to-face services. The proposal to create a Council office in the Cowley Centre, Templars Square was also supported with the exception of South East Area Committee. That Committee took the view that local service provision, particularly housing services, would be better placed on the estates in Blackbird Leys and Rose Hill.

9. A survey of users of existing Local Services Shops, a sample group of tenants, and shoppers in the Cowley Centre was also conducted to gauge public support for a Council office there. The questionnaire can be found at Appendix 2 and the results analysis at Appendix 3.

10. At the time of writing the first 94 responses had been analysed. In brief the results showed that 87 thought it a good idea, 20 would use it regularly and 64 occasionally. Only 2 thought it was probably not a good idea. 40 out of 42 Blackbird Leys residents said they would use the new site. A further 250 responses are due to be analysed and the results will be reported verbally at the meeting.

Recommendations:

Executive Board is asked to comment on the consultation paper and:

1. Agree to maintain and extend the current commitment to face-to-face service delivery
2. Confirm that the Cowley Centre is an appropriate site for a Local Council Office
3. Confirm that bids for the initial set up costs and annual running costs for such an office be submitted for consideration in the 2007/8 budget setting process.
4. Agree that the future provision of a City centre facility be concluded out of the negotiations with the developers of the St Aldates Chambers site.

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Background papers:

Consultation Paper on Face-to-Face services
Consultation results data.

