

Report of: Strategic Director for Housing, Health and Community

To: Executive Board

Date: 5th November 2007

Item No:

Title of Report : Local Council Office, Cowley Centre – Project Approval



Summary and Recommendations



Purpose of report: To provide proposals to enter into a lease of Unit 2 – 3
Bank Court Templar Square Cowley, to provide local services from a site at
the Cowley Centre

Key decision: Yes

Portfolio Holder: Cllr David Rundle

Scrutiny Responsibility: Community



Ward(s) affected: Cowley

Report Approved by



Portfolio Holder: Cllr Rundle

Legal: Jeremy Thomas



Finance: Christopher Kaye

Strategic Director: Michael Lawrence



Policy Framework: Customer Contact Strategy



Recommendation(s): It is recommended that:



1. Executive Board approve the lease of a vacant unit in the Cowley Centre to provide a local service shop for a temporary period of 2 years
2. Executive Board note that in the longer term it is planned to take space in the refurbished Post Office site in the Cowley Centre. A report to Board will be made when more detail is available.



Background

1. The Council has an agreed customer contact strategy that commits us to
 - providing customers with more choice about how they access Council services
 - increasing the range of services that customers can access through each service channel
 - improving the quality of the services that we provide across all access channels
 - achieving value for money.

A corporate customer contact improvement team was brought together two years ago and led by the Strategic Director for Housing Health and Community.

The group considered the future strategy for the Councils contact with its customers in three parts – face to face, telephony and the web. With regard to face-to-face services the following recommendations were agreed.

The Council should:-

- Organise fixed-site provision in a hub formation – one central city location supported by a small number of neighbourhood offices.
- Determine office location on the basis of customer demand rather than current location of Council buildings.
- Close remaining receptions in the city centre and offices in the neighbourhoods where demand is low

2. The improvement team identified the Cowley Centre as a site, which would meet the corporate strategy, in particular, that:-

- it is located at a point which would be accessible to several large centres of population with high demand for Council services
- it complies with the council's Social Inclusion policy of improving access to services
- it has good transport links
- it is a natural location for a contact hub because it is frequented by customers for other purposes

3. After the business case was outlined during the budget/Capital programme setting process last year, provision was made in the budget for the next three years to enter into a lease & refurbishment of a suitable site. Initially, Officers had planned to utilise some spare capacity in the ex-Post Office site in the Cowley Centre but it has become obvious that this is a long term option i.e the Post Office plans are not developed sufficiently at this time.

4. Officers have found a smaller, vacant unit, previously occupied by the Beneficial Bank, which can be leased to the Council for up to 2 years allowing

time for the Post Office site to be developed without delaying an improvement to customer services in the interim.

Expenditure

5. It is proposed the Council lease the unit for 2 years at an annual rental of up to £20K. The 1st year lease and running costs can be met from the £50k budget already set aside for 07/08. The 2nd year lease and running costs can be met from the £75k already set aside for 08/09.

6. Estimated annual cost of the unit at Cowley Centre is as follows:-

Description	Amount £
Rent –	£20,000.00
Business Rates	£8,500.00
Service Charges	£1,623.00
External Telephone Charges	£1,400.00
Other Computing Services - Comms Line	£5,000.00
Cleaning and Maintenance	£1,500.00
Electricity	£2,000.00
Supplies and Services	£2,000.00
Total	<u>£42,023.00</u>

7. At the time of writing this report the final agreed design was not available so set up costs are only estimated, a verbal update will be made to Board on 5th Nov. Set up would include design and build both internally and externally, DDA compliance works, communications links for phone and data and office equipment. Discussions with Oxford City Homes and the building design team in Built Environment are currently suggesting a capital cost of between £75K and £80K.

Staffing Implications

8. Staffing costs will need to be carefully managed. It is hoped that reduced footfall in the St Aldate's City Centre shop and other Local service shops will allow redeployment of staff hours to the new shop. There is some risk that during the initial launch phase staff numbers may be insufficient to fully staff 4 shops.

9. Officers will advise Members of progress dealing with this risk as the opening date approaches.

Financial Implications

10. £50k revenue for 07/08 has already been set aside and should be sufficient to fund lease and running costs to 31 Mar 08. £120k capital for 2007/08 has already been set aside to fund refurbishment costs. £75k revenue has been set aside for 08/09 & again for 09/10. Officers will report to

Board again should these budgets prove insufficient (particularly when work begins for the development of the Post Office site).

Other Opportunities

11. Discussions are taking place with the Credit Union to see if they would like to have space in the shop for an advisor to open accounts. The County Council have also expressed some interest in having a presence but details of services are not yet established. If these opportunities to expand services prove successful then any available additional resources can be used to mitigate costs to the City Council.

Recommendations

12. It is recommended that:

- Executive Board approve the proposals to lease the unit at Templar Square for two years
- Executive Board note that further report regarding the Post Office site will be made when more detail is available.

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Background papers:

None

