

Support Services Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday 24 November 2011

PRESENT:

Councillor James, in the Chair.

Councillor Mrs Aspinall (substituting Councillor Lowry), Vice Chair.

Councillors Browne (substituting Councillor Berrow), Lock, McDonald, Murphy, Mrs Nelder, Rennie, Stark, Stevens and Thompson (substituting Councillor Delbridge) .

Apologies for absence: Councillors Reynolds, Lowry, Evans, Casey, Delbridge.

Also in attendance: Councillor Ian Bowyer – Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and People, Karen Ward – Superintendent Registrar, Tim Howes – Assistant Director for Democracy and Governance, Chris Trevitt – Head of Capital and Assets, Paul Chapman – Head of Value for Money and Efficiencies and Ross Jago – Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 4 pm and finished at 5.20 pm

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

60. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest in accordance with the code of conduct.

61. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

62. **RELOCATION OF THE REGISTER OFFICE TO POUNDS HOUSE**

Councillor Ian Bowyer, cabinet member for Finance, Property and People introduced the report to the panel. It was reported that –

- (a) the proposal was returning to the panel to answer questions posed by panel members, the second phase of the Accommodation Strategy had been considered and agreed at cabinet and council;
- (b) the proposal was a good example of how assets held by the council could be better utilised;
- (c) the current building was no longer fit for purpose, in particular the heating system required an upgrade and the building was not fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act;

- (d) costs relating to the proposal were contained with the report, the council expected to realise revenue savings of £75,000 per annum;
- (e) answers to the 14 questions asked by panel members had been circulated via email;
- (f) the report contained details of modes of transport used by customers of the Register Office. 70 per cent of journeys were made by car and travel by taxi accounted for a further 15 per cent of journeys to the Register Office.

In response to questions from members of the panel it was reported that –

- (g) data on mode of travel had been collected at the Register Office from customers who were willing to take part. 216 customers had responded over September and October with a further 257 responses collected during November. The data collected demonstrated that 66 per cent of journeys were made by car;
- (h) a traffic impact assessment had been carried out on access to the Pounds House site, the results of the assessment had shown that access could operate within its maximum reserve flow capacity when modeled at the worst case scenario;
- (i) officers had met with local business owners who had raised concerns regarding the possible loss of trade. It was reported that the relocation of the Register Office to an area with minimal hospitality facilities would not impact on facilities in St Peter and The Waterfront Ward;
- (j) since the proposal to move the Register Office had been reported in the press the service had heard from a number of couples who hoped to delay their weddings until the move to Pounds House had been completed. It was anticipated that the move to Pounds House would increase the number of people from outside Plymouth getting married in the city;
- (k) the possibility of having death registrations within Derriford Hospital had previously been explored but not as part of the relocation proposal. Having a death registration service would involve further use of resource as there would be a requirement for up to three registrars on duty at the hospital along with the possibility of revenue costs in terms of accommodation rental;
- (l) there were no proposals for a licensed bar or for receptions to be held at Pounds House;
- (m) ad-hoc visits to the Register Office were infrequent as most customers made an appointment;
- (n) there was a possible £400,000 capital receipt available from the Lockyer

Street site. The Head of Capital and Assets confirmed that the council would not be in a position to sell the site for at least a year and a judgment on how best to use the asset would be made at that time. The site would not be sold in the current economic climate.

Panel members expressed disappointment that incorrect details within the report regarding the bus services serving the site had not been corrected since the last presentation to the panel.

Agreed that-

1. the report and the information within it are noted;
2. the panel strongly opposes the sale of the site during a downturn in the property market;
3. the panel expresses serious concerns regarding transport, in particular public transport links to the site;
4. the panel expressed concerns that no agreement with the hospitality trade had been made;
5. the panel requests that as part of proposal, the possibility of locating a death registrar at Derriford hospital is explored.

63. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.