



# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Thursday, 7th July, 2022

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Bill Hartnett (Chair), Councillor Joanna Kane (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Salman Akbar, Imran Altaf, Michael Chalk, Brandon Clayton, Sid Khan, Timothy Pearman and Gareth Prosser

### Also Present:

Councillor Joe Baker

### Officers:

Peter Carpenter, Kevin Dicks, Claire Felton, Helen Mole and Chris Wells

### Democratic Services Officers:

Jess Bayley-Hill and Gavin Day

## 26. FUTURE USE OF THE TOWN HALL AND CUSTOMER ACCESS - PRE-DECISION-SCRUTINY (REPORT TO FOLLOW)

The Interim Section 151 Officer presented the report in respect of the future use of the town hall and closure of the cashier service.

Members were informed that in person payments had fallen by 90% since the pandemic and with the introduction of Allpay for the majority of services. A test period of two weeks in March was conducted which resulted in only 202 visitors.

Officers highlighted the different ways to pay mentioned in the report, and highlighted there were 44 possible alternative pay locations for the public to access, including the post office less than 100m away.

Members were informed that there would be a dedicated manned customer service desk opened and the telephone and internet access would be retained. This would allow colleagues to assist the public to access alternative forms of payment after the 3 Month period had elapsed.

Chair

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Members were informed of the proposal to sublet the cashier area to public sector tenants, which would generate approximately £150,000 in revenue for the council.

Following the presentation of the report, Members queried the following areas.

- Why the two weeks were chosen in March which was a rent-free month and thus would be expected to generate lower numbers. Officers replied that although that was the case there were also a large number of late payments, so it was felt to still be a suitable time period to get an indication of how busy the cashier desk was.
- Whether there were any redundancies planned. Officers clarified that there would be no redundancies. Everybody who worked on the cash desk would be given employment in other roles within the town hall. The jobs initially intended to be filled were on the customer service desk and manning the telephones, which the cashiers did as part of their current role.
- The report mentioned a potential income of £150,000, and Members questioned how many square meters this represented. Officers replied that the proposed areas would be the current cash office area and part of the first floor which amounted to approximately 2000sq meters in total.
- Whether the prospective tenants were from the public or private sector. Officers clarified that all prospective tenants were public sector organisations. The council would be looking to combine District, County and Health services in one building.
- What the car parking provision would be for tenants. Officers clarified that tenants would be able to use the car park on Trescott Road. The car park on the town hall site would be retained for its current usage.
- How the council intended to improve IT literacy for those who currently used the service. Officers outlined the council's intent to use the following 3 months to educate the general public on payment via other methods, such as by phone, on site computer terminals and their own devices using WiFi or pay points such as the post office.
- The timing of the report. Officers explained that the discussions had progressed very quickly with prospective tenants, however, before Officers brought the proposal to Committee they had to ensure the cashier service would not be needed, This had only just been decided.

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The following comments and statements were also made in relation to the report:

- Members commented that even with access to digital technologies increasing there was still a need for face-to-face interactions. Officers clarified that there would still be a face-to-face provision via the customer service desk.
- Officers further commented that Redditch Borough Council was the last authority in the Midlands to still offer a cashier service to process payments.
- Members commented that they were happy that there would be no intention to lose any staff as employees were leaving the council and there was a need to retain the workforce. Officers commented that there were general recruitment challenges which were being reviewed, the council would be looking at the whole package of benefits for employees, including agile working.
- Members commented that the Council needed to learn from the one stop shop closures and ensure that the process was given enough time.
- Some Members expressed the view that two weeks was not enough time to come to a recommendation and queried why there were not several months of data for April, May and June, so that a decision could be made on the basis of more up to date information

The Chair explained to Members that this was a resolved matter so after recommendation the matter would go to Executive Committee to be decided and not full Council.

The recommendations contained within the report were proposed and seconded and it was

## **RECOMMENDED that the Executive Committee**

- 1) Approve the Closure of the Cashiers Service on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022;**
- 2) Note the alternatives for Customers to make payments and the training and guidance that would take place up to the closure date.**
- 3) Approve the proposals to sublet parts of the Town Hall**

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- 4) **Delegate authority to the Head of Legal Democratic and Property Services and the Section 151 Officer following consultation with the Leader to negotiate terms and enter into the lease arrangements necessary to enable resolution 3.**

The Meeting commenced at 6.30 pm  
and closed at 8.28 pm