



Ryedale District Council

REPORT TO: Policy & Resources Committee

DATE: 2 August 2007

REPORTING OFFICERS: Director of Policy, Marie-Ann Jackson
& Customer Services Manager, Alice Thirlwall

SUBJECT: **KIRKBYMOORSIDE CUSTOMER CENTRE**

WARDS AFFECTED: Kirkbymoorside and Adjacent Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To confirm the Council's commitment to working in partnership with NYCC on the development of the Church House project in Kirkbymoorside with a view to transferring the Council's area office functions from the existing Community Office building to the new Customer Centre in summer 2008.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that:

- i. The Council confirms its commitment to the Church House project;
- ii. Agrees to transfer its area office and local Housing Benefit advice services to the new facility on completion;
- iii. The Council supports in principal the possible operation of the Kirkbymoorside Community Partnership services from the new facility and explores options to help facilitate this.

3.0 REASONS SUPPORTING DECISION

3.1 It is agreed by the North Yorkshire District Council's Network in relation to improved two tier working that one of the stated priorities is Access to Services and the provision where possible of one stop shop customer access points.

3.2 The Local Area Agreement – between NYCC and the 7 District Councils – includes a network of one stop shops as a stretch target under the Stronger Communities block.

3.3 The Council's Corporate Plan and Customer Access Strategy prioritise the provision of joint Customer Centres in the market towns.

4.0 POLICY CONTEXT

4.1 The project delivers across the following corporate policy objective:
Corporate Plan - Aim 6 – "To have efficient and effective high quality services, accessible to everyone in a way that suits them."

5.0 BACKGROUND

5.1 The project has been developed as a result of the research carried out as part of the Renaissance Market Towns initiative. A multi-use project was identified in Kirkbymoorside as having benefit to the town and includes the following elements:

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- a single, point of access to local authority and other public services supporting better take-up of benefit entitlements, learning opportunities and job opportunities;
 - a Learning centre which will provide courses delivered by a range of providers identified primarily through the Area Learning Partnership.
 - a fully accessible library service with expanded free, staff-supported ICT and internet access available for general interest, homework support and e-learning.
- 5.2 The centre will provide increased and integrated access to NYCC and Ryedale District Services making the customer experience of contacting the Council more streamlined and joined up.
- 5.3 The Library will be fully accessible to all members of the Community and increased ICT provision will allow local learners an additional practice environment.
- 5.4 The Learning Facility will address the learning needs for the town and environs. Kirkbymoorside and the surrounding area have above regional and national average rates of adults with poor basic skills in both literacy and numeracy. (Economic Needs Analysis Helmsley Kirkbymoorside Pickering, Amion 2004)
- 5.5 At present, there is a small library in Kirkbymoorside and a small community office. The building is in the Council ownership although it is operated by the Kirkbymoorside Community Partnership.

6.0 INTRODUCTION

- 6.1 NYCC has been investigating properties in Kirkbymoorside for the re-location of the library for a number of years. The development of the Church House project as a combined library, learning centre and customer resource centre has been on-going for approximately 12 months. The project is owned and led by NYCC, although it has been assisted in the early feasibility by the Delivery Team at Ryedale District Council. A feasibility study was carried out on the building in October 2006 and the outline business case was submitted to Yorkshire Forward in December 2006.

7.0 REPORT

- 7.1 The project is now at the stage where some key decisions are required from the various partner agencies in order for the full business case to be confirmed. These include lease arrangements with the owners, capital costs, revenue funding streams, staffing and the future integration of the existing Community Office services and functions.
- 7.2 **Key Decisions** - the key decisions at this stage for this Council are summarised as:
- i. Confirmation of the agreed policy to develop a shared Customer Centre with NYCC in Kirkbymoorside (Corporate Plan, Objective 16 Action 2);
 - ii. Agreement that the Council will transfer its area office and local Housing Benefits Advice services from the existing community office to the Church House Customer Centre in 2008;
 - iii. Agreement that the Council should support in principal the continuance of the Kirkbymoorside Community Partnership (KCP) services and explore options for the generation of revenue from the Council's asset to assist this.
- 7.3 **Lease** - the lease will be between NYCC and the owners.
- 7.4 **Capital Costs** - the costs for capital works will be met by both Yorkshire Forward and

NYCC funding and there is no capital liability to Ryedale District Council in relation to the project.

- 7.5 **Revenue Costs** - the costs of running the facility will be primarily met by NYCC, although Ryedale District Council will continue to meet its current and budgeted for staffing costs.
- 7.6 **Staffing** - the Council currently operates area office functions and a housing benefit advice service from the Community Office. This facility, although owned by the Council, is operated by a local community trust. They also employ information services staff. The upstairs space is rented by North Yorkshire Police.
- 7.7 **Benefits of transfer**
The existing Ryedale District Council service offer is for 12 hours per week service (24 staff hours per week)
- The offer can be increased by 12 hours per week though joint working with the NYCC library staff at no additional staffing cost to the Council;
 - Improved customer service from all council service enquiries being available in one facility;
 - Reduced operating liabilities from a rationalisation of buildings.
- 7.8 In developing the project it has been an aspiration of the partners to work with KCP who operate the community office in order to compliment their services rather than compete with them. This facility is open for 30 hours per week currently and offers information, ICT facilities and some training. However the size of the building restricts any further development at this site and limits the level of income generated. As such the facility is not financially sustainable in the long term. Both this Council and NYCC grant aided the facility in March 2006 in order for them to continue to function until November 2007.
- 7.9 The Council currently pays rent to the community office for use of the facility in the sum of £1,500 per annum. A transfer to the new facility would reduce the sustainability of community office further.
- 7.10 Officers continue to work with KCP to seek to secure a future for them as an integrated element of the new facility. This will only be possible if an income stream can be identified to support the retention of their staff and services.
- 7.11 Options are being explored regarding the possibility of generating this income from alternative uses of the community office building itself. This is the Council's asset and if it became vacant there may be the potential to generate an income either through sale or lease. The Council's asset management policies would presume that if the Council had no further operational use for the building it would seek to dispose through sale unless there was an opportunity for conversion to affordable housing.
- 7.12 The building sits within the town centre commercial limits and as such would be suitable – in principle – for a number of uses: office, retail or housing. The options will be investigated further and will be reported back to Members in October.
- 7.13 At this stage, Members are being asked to consider in principle whether any capital receipt could be ring-fenced for the future retention of the community office functions however it should be noted that this would require a change in policy. Current policy would presume that any capital receipt would go into the Council's general funds. It should be further noted that the Council is currently seeking to identify significant

revenue savings to support its own capital programme.

- 7.14 The building, former public toilets, received grant aid for its conversion and there may be a requirement to pay back some, or all of that, grant from any disposal. This risk is increased if the receipt is not used to support the retention of the community office functions.
- 7.15 The various options in this regard will be reported to Members in October. However an in principal approval – and without prejudice to the value of any level of income achieved – is sought at this stage that the revenue can be ring-fenced.

8.0 OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The above scenarios are based on the assumption that the Church House project will move successfully to completion by summer 2008. If the project is delayed or does not progress to completion the assumption is that the Council will continue to operate from the community office building.
- 8.2 This carries additional considerations in regard to the future sustainability of the community office organisation. The facility is not, as stated previously, sustainable in the long term and will require significant public subsidy if it is to continue in its current form. The extent of this is currently being discussed KCP and in the event that this is required – due to the non progression of the Church House project – will be reported to Members in due course.
- 8.3 KCP has also expressed a concern that the timescale for the Church House project is such that it may not, without additional financial support, be able to continue its operation until such a time that a transfer of services can take place. Again the implications of this are being discussed with them and will be reported to Members in due course. It is likely that they will be seeking additional support from this Council to bridge any gap between their potential closure and the opening of the new facility.

9.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no additional financial applications resulting from the simple transfer of service from Community Office to Church House.
- 9.2 If Members wish to support the continuance of KCP services as part of the Church House project there may be additional financial implications for the Council. Options can be explored in relation to seeking to generate an income stream from the Council's asset to be used to support the service - para 7.11 above refers .
- 9.3 In the event that the Church House project does not progress to completion the Council will potentially incur additional annual revenue costs: either as overheads and running costs as sole occupiers of the existing community office or through financial support to enable the continued operation of the Kirkbymoorside Community Partnership.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 A license agreement will need to be drawn up between NYCC and the Council for permission to occupy the Church House premises.

11.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 11.1 The county council carry the risks associated with the capital development of Church House and the majority of the on-going revenue risks. The risks associated with Ryedale District Council agreeing to transfer its operation are low at this stage. The

principle risk to the Council is a failure in the future to realise an income from its building asset – the existing community office.

- 11.2 A shared risk associated with the project is the impact that the future sustainability of the Community Office may have. This is a valued facility in Kirkbymoorside and if the Church House project is perceived as a diminution in service there may be a risk of damage to the reputation of both authorities. To mitigate this risk, the Council is seeking to explore a means to provide on-going support to the Kirkbymoorside Community Partnership to provide its services in the future from Church House. This requires co-operation and a willingness to work together for the benefit of the community from all parties.
- 11.3 The steering group for the project has consulted widely with the local community and the business community. The results of the consultation show significant support for the development of the facility with over 70% of people responding that they felt the project would provide a much needed resource for the area.
- 12.0 CONCLUSION**
- 12.1 The project is at a significant stage in its development and requires firm commitments from all parties in order for the business plan, to be submitted for Yorkshire Forward funding, to be approved. Without the external funding the project will fail.
- 12.2 This report asks Members: to confirm its on-going commitment to the project; whether it wishes to seek to retain the services and functions of the existing community office; and if so to authorise officers to investigate options for income generation from future use of the Council's asset.

OFFICER CONTACT:

Please contact Alice Thirlwall (Customer Services Manager) if you require any further information on the contents of this report. The officer can be contacted at Ryedale District Council, Ryedale House, Malton, YO17 7HH. Tel: 01653 600666, Extension 308, or by e-Mail to: alice.thirlwall@ryedale.gov.uk