

SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL SERVICE OFFER AT USK HUB

MEETING: INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISION

CABINET MEMBER: COUNCILLOR PAUL JORDAN

DATE: 24TH October 2018

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

To seek approval for officers to explore the feasibility of, and produce a business case for, the opening of a Post Office within Usk Hub following the announcement of the planned closure of the current facility on Bridge Street.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That officers explore the legal and financial position concerning the potential to run a Post Office in Usk Hub.
- 2.2 That subject to satisfactory conclusion of the above actions, to enter into a non-binding application process with Post Office Ltd.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 The town of Usk sits at the Heart of Monmouthshire and benefits from many shops, food establishments and other businesses which enrich the lives not only of those within the town but also of the many thousands of people from surrounding communities who benefit from it.
- 3.2 Barclays Bank closed its doors at the end of September and the local sub-post office also announced its intention to close following the planned retirement of the existing Postmistress. Attempts by the Post Office's Local Area Network Manager to find someone

willing to take on the operation proved unsuccessful and Usk presently faces the possibility of having no post office or banking service which would have a detrimental impact on our purpose of helping to build sustainable and resilient communities.

- 3.3 Local authorities in Wales have the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental well-being under the Local Government Act 2000. This is enhanced by the Well-being of Future Generations Act which places a duty on public bodies to take an integrated and collaborative approach to improving well-being of current and future generations of residents identifying innovative and shared solutions to some of the most pressing challenges facing our communities.
- 3.4 Monmouthshire's Community Hubs were created by a decision of Cabinet in May 2015 and have proved successful in maintaining front-line services including one-stop-shops and libraries within a single site in each of our largest towns. Other community services such as food banks also use the hubs and colleagues in Monmouth and Abergavenny will soon benefit from working alongside officers from Gwent Police in an expanded hub offer. If financially and legally feasible the offer a Post Office service would be a further expansion of the hub offer while maintaining an important local service.
- 3.5 Initial and informal discussions have been held with the Post Office. However there is little legal precedent for local authorities operating this service, and in particular the necessary financial regulations and risks associated with operating financial services and so further legal guidance will be needed before committing formally to an application.

4. REASONS:

To enable the continued provision of local services which are important for the sustainability of a key town in Monmouthshire.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Post Office counter services would be expected to deliver an income of between £12,000 and £14,000. If the opening hours were to mirror those of the current hub operation this would not be sufficient to cover the uplift in staffing needed to cover counter services. It is anticipated that the difference could be met by contributions from existing budgets and the Town Council, subject to separate decision by that body.

Longer term the closure of Barclays Bank on Bridge Street may result in the potential to increase income from counter services. However, at this stage the business case will be developed on conservative estimates of future income streams that do not assume significant growth from factors outside the control of the local authority.

6. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

The Future Generations Act requires public bodies to prevent problems occurring or getting worse and take an integrated and collaborative approach. The Office is used by people of all generations but its loss would be felt particularly by older residents and those without access to a car who would otherwise need to journey to other towns to conduct transactions contributing to congestion and increasing carbon emissions. Preserving a local service would have positive benefits for local businesses who would be without a local financial service to deposit and withdraw cash.

7. CONSULTEES:

Cabinet
SLT

Discussions have also involved Councillor Brian Strong, Councillor Sheila Woodhouse and some members of Usk Town Council. Further opportunities were identified during consultation, such as whether a cash-point could be part of the offer and the optimal location for any potential service. These will be considered as part of any option appraisal process.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

9. AUTHOR:

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