



**Corporate Policy &
Resources**

19th September 2019

Subject: Customer Hub Refurbishment

Report by:

Executive Director of Resources

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To provide a benefits analysis and financial business case for the refurbishment of the Customer Hub; and seek approval to commence refurbishment.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That approval is given for the Council to:

1. Refurbish the Customer Hub;
2. Contract for further design and build activities under a SCAPE framework with Lindum Construction
3. Support project expenditure of up to £350k be funded from the Property Asset Fund Earmarked Reserve to cover the cost of the refurbishment and internal costs
4. To re-use the remaining earmarked reserve allocated originally to this project of £150K for refurbishment and changes to the 3rd Floor.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

(N.B.) Where there are legal implications the report MUST be seen by the MO

Framework Contract under SCAPE will require Legal involvement

Financial : FIN/76/20

Within the Capital programme there is a budget of £515k funded from the Property Asset Fund Earmarked Reserve. Estimated costs for the project total £324k , consideration of a formal budget of upto £350k should be considered to cover any price changes/contingencies (8%).

Any ongoing revenue implications would need to be built into the Medium Term Financial Plan, however at this stage cannot be quantified.

Formal approval to revise the current budget provision from £515k to £350k and to agree expenditure is required from Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

Staffing :

(N.B.) Where there are staffing implications the report MUST have a HR Ref

Relocation impact on staff from Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits Teams

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

NB: Please explain how you have considered the policy's impact on different groups (for example: young people, elderly, ethnic minorities, LGBT community, rural residents, disabled, others).

Improved facilities and functions for those with diversity and equality considerations; providing better capability to the Council and partners to manage these groups.

Data Protection Implications :

No direct implications. PC provision improves overlooking situation in current layout.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities :

None

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations :

None

Health Implications:

Reduces H&S implications caused by current Hub set-up and dealing with difficult or aggressive customers.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

Risk Assessment :

Reduces H&S implications caused by current Hub set-up and dealing with difficult or aggressive customers.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

1. Background and Current Position

The Council's Customer Hub was last refurbished in autumn 2014, as a result of the decision for DWP Gainsborough Job Centre to re-locate into the Hub. At that time of the last refurbishment, the design of the Hub was based on a pure 'tenancy' allocation of space, rather than a design around the needs and functions of the partners and Customers within the Hub.

As well as WLDC and DWP, other partners located into the Guildhall (including VCS, CAB and Lincolnshire County Council) also make use of the Customer Hub for their Visitors / Customers; and utilise aspects of the Customer Hub facilities to service those visitors.

The Council also has arrangements with other third party organisations such as HMRC to provide (rent) space within the Hub for surgeries on either a regular or ad-hoc basis. These are seen to supplement a wider range of public sector services for our Customers.

Over the last four years, whilst visitor/customer numbers have stayed relatively stable, the demands of the visitors to the Hub has significantly changed, with more complex and varied needs becoming more prevalent, often requiring longer visit times. This has led to level of overcapacity within a relatively small area, partly influenced by the layout of the current Hub.

Over the same period, the nature of services delivered; and the aspirations of the Council and its Partners within the Hub have changed, and as a result, the current set-up and layout of the Hub is now limiting service delivery for all Hub operators. Appendix 1 sets out a summary of the problems being experienced by those operators. Appendix 2 sets out customer feedback on the issues that they experience.

These issues have had a more detrimental effect on the Council who are forced to compromise on their own delivery approach in order to ensure that tenancy requirements are met.

In terms of the future, there are a number of considerations which the Council need to take into account in terms of the management of the Hub.

1. The profile of customers for the Council and other Hub operators is changing, with a higher demand for more complex issues, needing a greater level of time and support. These customers may also have other considerations such as physical or mental health issues which need to be taken into account when dealing with that customer.
2. The increase of complex cases changes the nature of the facilities we need to provide, and more 'confidential' space is needed to accommodate those customers.
3. As Universal Credit continues to roll out within the West Lindsey District, the expectation is that visitors to the Hub will rise; as more customers outside of the existing customer base will require Council, DWP and CAB services. This will again increase customers who require 'lengthy' visits to the Hub.
4. Both DWP and the Council are moving to utilising online or digital capabilities for serving their customers, even within a face to face environment; and this will change the style of facilities required. However, both partners recognise that whilst digital capabilities can assist face-to-face visitors, there will always be some customers who require fully staff assisted service provision; and the Customer Hub must be able to support both methods.

5. The Councils Customer First transformation programme will change the way the Council provides interaction services to Customers, and the concept of the consolidated frontline and more defined backline will mean that any F2F space needs to be able to support those changes.
6. The Councils digital ambitions within the ICT programme means that the Hub will require different ICT capabilities to ensure that we can maximise digital opportunities within service provision.
7. As the volume of more complex customers increase; a strategy for management of those customers, needs to be agreed with all partners within the building; and customer management protocols revisited within any tenancy agreement.
8. The Council is increasingly engaging with a wider range of customers and stakeholders; and creating space within the Customer Hub for these activities creates a more multi-use location, and reduces the demand of meeting space elsewhere in the building;

As a result of these current issues and the needs and aspirations of the Council and its partners, the decision was made to review the layout of the Customer Hub, with a view to refurbishment.

2. Requirements for a Refurbished Hub

After consultation with Partners and Customers, the following were deemed important requirements for any refurbished Customer Hub and were included within the brief for the initial Architecture design:

1. Branding and design colour zoning of partners, functions and areas need to be included within the Hub design.
2. The initial reception/entry area should appear spacious, welcoming and be able to accommodate a number of meet and greet staff, waiting in the area.
3. The design should allow for good customer flow, and minimise congestion.
4. The layout of the Hub needs to support two types of customers, those that have quick and simple needs, and those that require more complex or lengthy needs and conversations. The design should accommodate these needs in different areas of the Hub if possible to reduce congestion.
5. The design needs to respect current tenancy arrangements where possible, in terms of space allocation and permissions.
6. There is a need to increase the 'private' conversational areas, by providing more discreet small meeting spaces away from busy or noisy areas.
7. Split seating/waiting areas to accommodate different partner's customers; and different waiting purposes will improve customer management and customer flow. Seating areas should be away from the main central area.
8. Multiple entry/exit options should be evaluated to improve customer flow, and reduce H&S concerns.

9. Space and function should be designed with multi use purposes and flexibility in mind, to ensure that the Hub can accommodate future changes over the next 10 years.
10. Flexible space to be created to support the need for larger group meetings or customer engagement/consultation/presentational situations, but which can also be used for other purposes, thereby not creating occasional use spaces or dead spaces.
11. ICT provision needs to support both quick turnaround queries, and those requiring the use of PCs for longer periods of use. Ideally these should be split into different stand-up and sit-down areas in different locations. Sit down areas should provide an element of screen privacy. It must also include space for new digital capabilities such as touch screen facilities, card payments, digital scanning, and improved upstairs visitor management.

3. Architectural Design Proposals

The Council appointed an Architect practise, Frank Shaw and Associates to undertake initial feasibility studies in options around refurbishment of the Upper and Ground Floors of the Guildhall.

The Architects, on the basis of consultation with all partners in the Guildhall, provided three outline design proposals and option 3 was considered the most preferable to all partners, and appeared to meet the brief and needs of the partners more fully.

In particular it:

- Retained the current tenancy arrangements with DWP
- Provided separate customer waiting areas, away from the main thoroughfare;
- Provided better manage customer flow, and addressed H&S concerns over incident management;
- Addressed the requirements for geographical areas designed to service quick turnaround customers and customers requiring longer visit times;
- Increased private discussion areas for use of all partners; whilst retaining good visuals of all spaces
- Removed customer congestion from the Marshalls Yard entrance and central areas;
- Addressed the ICT aspirations of both the Council and DWP;
- Provided flexible facilities which could be used for multiple uses, including group meeting demands and customer engagement/consultation opportunities.

The design has implications on other areas of the Ground Floor, including the Contact Centre, Post room, Kitchen and Rest Room areas. The small Kitchen area and the Post Room will be retained on the Ground Floor. The Contact Centre, and Staff Rest Room (currently behind the Customer Hub) will need to be relocated to alternative locations.

The DWP staff would have access to the rest room on the 1st floor, (which is already included within the existing lease). The Contact Centre will re-locate to the 2nd floor in the current R&B team area, with the Customer Services (WLDC) staff utilising the rest room on the 2nd floor.

The final version of the design is shown in Appendix 1.

4. Benefits of the Refurbishment

- a) A layout which accommodates the way partners want to deliver their customer service, and which reduces the issues raised by our customers.
- b) Greater floor space to accommodate the growing number of customers, and the more complex demands requiring longer appointment times.
- c) More flexible space, which allows a multi-use approach for areas of the Customer Hub, and provides flexibility and future resilience as needs and aspirations of the partners change.
- d) A more modern, fit for purpose environment, accommodating new ways of working, and future developments.
- e) A design which allows for the provision of 'quick request' related enquires at front of shop, and moving 'longer' transactions to the 'back of shop, reducing congestion in the central area.
- f) Less congestion in the central area:
 - a. reduces health & safety risks should incidents occur within the Hub;
 - b. provides the space to deliver 'meet and greet' customer assistance support to customers, improving the overall experience, and providing more dedicated assistance to those that need it;
 - c. improves the 'friendly & approachable' perception of the Hub;
- g) An increase in private areas for discussions with customers (a key element of the feedback from customers).
- h) More digital self service capabilities, including booking, payment and document capabilities to meet the digital aspirations of the Customer First strategy; and our partners digital strategies.
- i) Private ICT facilities, for completion of applications, claims and other such transactions, reducing the risk of sensitive information being seen by others.
- j) Improved waiting provision for both Customer Hub and Business Visitors.
- k) Improved meeting facilities to support customer engagement for both the Council and its partner's needs, removing the health and safety risk of transporting customers to 'closed' part of the building where no security facilities are in place. This also removes dependence on other Council meeting rooms, which are in demand.

5. Financial Considerations

Lindums were appointed under a SCAPE framework to provide design and build services. Outline design activities have been undertaken to identify the costs of delivering the design proposals.

The following section outlines the costs for the refurbishment (physical build) of the Customer Hub (refurbishment costs) and the internal costs related to the moving of staff, provision of ICT, CCTV and other such ancillary items.

Refurbishment Costs

The summary of design and build costs provided are as follows.

1.	Pre-construction charges	£5799.16
2.	Design Costs	£7875.00
3.	Construction	£240,610.58
		£254,284.74
4.	Risk Contingency	£13,500.00
	Total Project Feasibility Costs	£267,784.74

Internal Costs

The Council will also incur costs associated with internal works, including strip out of the Hub; temporary wiring and other requirements to support a phased delivery of the Hub refurbishment; and relocation of staff from the ground floor to the 2nd floor.

Known Costs associated with the move to the 2nd floor are:

1.	Relocation of Customer Services to 2 nd Floor	£17,809.85
2.	Disposal of furniture and other items	£1,400
3.	Potential removal of 2 nd floor meeting rooms	£2,000-£4,000
4.	Replacement (2 nd floor) smaller Desks	estimated £3000
5.	Noise cancelling desk dividers	estimated £2500
	Total Relocation Costs	£28,709

Note: Further work is required to ascertain whether any wiring and network connection work would be required within the space.

The design incorporates two revised ICT areas – sit down and self-service provision. The existing PCs could be reutilised (with design options for better service provision) for the sit down, although it is noted that these computers are out-dated and have not been included within the ICT refresh. However, there will be a need to buy additional digital equipment for the self-service ICT area and the meet and greet functions. These are estimated as follows:

1.	Self-Service desk computers and screens x6	£3420
2.	Meet and Greet Tablets	estimated £3000
3.	Payment card readers x 4	£2040
	Total ICT Costs	£8,460

There are also additional costs related to the provision of CCTV within the extended space of the Customer Hub.

1.	CCTV extension	Estimated £9000
	Total Extension Costs	£9000

In addition, to improve the overall experience and functional use of the new refurbished Hub, the following optional additions could be considered (but not essential to the refurbishment)

1.	Scanning Kiosk (to improve customer document handling)	estimated £500
2.	Display Screen in presentation area	estimated £6000
3.	Refreshed Sit-down Computers (as not covered by ICT refresh) x6	£3420
	Total Additional Option Costs	£9,920

Proposals could potential be made to DWP to fund the provision of the display screen within the presentation area.

Total Costs

Total cost of the refurbishment is

1.	Refurbishment Build Costs	£266,796
2.	ICT Provision	£8,460
3.	Extensions Costs	£9000.00
4.	2 nd Floor Relocation Costs	£28,709
	Total Cost excluding Options	£313,954
5.	Optional Additions	£9,920
	Total Cost including Options	£323,874

The Council has provision of £515,000 within reserves for the replacement or refurbishment of the Customer Service.

6. Refurbishment Plans

If approval is given to refurbish the space, the project would start in January 2020. The developments would be completed in three phases to allow for the use of the Customer Hub in limited capacity, with the back space being completed in Phase 1, the central area in Phase 2; and the DWP space in Phase 3. It is anticipated that the build would take approximately 24 weeks to complete the three phases.

7. Recommendations

That approval is given for the Council to:

1. Refurbish the Customer Hub;
2. Contract for further design and build activities under a SCAPE framework with Lindum Constructon;
3. Support for project expenditure of up to £350k be funded from the Property Asset Fund Earmarked Reserve to cover the cost of the refurbishment and internal costs – CP&R approval required. The remainder to be used for 3rd Floor amendments.

8. Annex 1 – Existing problems with the Customer Hub Layout

Some of the problems experienced are:

- a) When first entering the Hub, it can be confusing to visitors to know where to 'go' or who to talk to; due to the two reception points. Non-DWP Visitors are frequently required to liaise with more than one person before they are 'served' or passed to the person they are visiting.
- b) Queues can develop at the two reception points, and due to their location, means that the entrance into the Hub can at times be congested. As there is only one entrance /exit, then can cause further congestion as visitors already within the Hub struggle to exit. Civic Events can also cause complications when the area outside of the entrance is congested by those attending the event and in poor weather conditions the congestion occurs within the entrance area, as there is no immediate space in which to accommodate groups of attendees to the civic event.
- c) There is no differential between those visitors which would be considered as 'quick turnaround' and those that need more complex and lengthy services. Customers wait in 'queue' for their turn to be dealt with, which can extend the time that Customers are present in the Hub. This can again add to congestion in the area.
- d) Council Officers have raised concerns that high profile visitors to the Council are required to enter, queue and wait within the Hub, along with other Customers. Staff have also heard comments being made by these visitors about having to wait with the Hub Customers.
- e) The location of the current seating area in the central area of the Hub makes customer flow around the Hub more difficult, and can cause obstruction when dealing with a complex/challenging event whereby we need to restrain or remove customers from the Hub.
- f) A single seating area is problematic for officers of each Hub partner, as
 - a. It is difficult to identify 'their customers'. This can at times result in increased volume of noise as Officers have to 'shout out' for their customer;
 - b. It is also difficult to recognise when there is increasing numbers of customers waiting for any particular service or partner, needing management changes to service provision or an increase in available resources; or
 - c. To identify where customers have been waiting an unreasonable amount of time to be dealt with by partners, or to be picked up and taken to alternative locations in the building.
- g) At busy times, the seating area is exceeded, and Customers then
 - a. sit at the work tables, reducing service desks for use by partners;
 - b. or hang around the main entrance, doors into the lobby or around the computer terminals

All of the above means that the Hub appears congested and chaotic and leads to heightened stress levels for staff who have to then be aware of other potential issues.

- h) As the central area of the Hub is the 'gathering point' for waiting Customers, feedback from some customers has shown that this can feel quite a 'daunting' environment. It has to be recognised that for some customers coming to the Council or DWP can be a stigma, before experiencing a then daunting environment.
- i) There are limited interview rooms, and the Council provided work tables within the central part of the Hub to increase discussion facilities. However, these tables are not private, being located between the seating area, the reception areas, and the PCs, therefore providing little confidentiality. This is also a noisy area of the Hub. As such these tables are not popular or well used, and add to the cluttered appearance of the Hub; with resulting impact to customer flow.
- j) For Customers being dealt with in the main areas of the Hub (rather than private interview rooms, customers often do not feel that the space is private, and frequently talk quietly as they do not want their conversations overheard by others. This can make it difficult for staff to fully hear and understand the conversation, leading to other difficulties, when trying to deal with that Customer.
- k) DWP require group space to carry out a variety of weekly group training sessions; 18-21 youth coaching, job clubs, employer recruitment events and other such 'return to work' activities at times. These sessions last a minimum of 3 hours through to a full day depending on what is being done. Unless there are first floor rooms available, these activities have to be undertaken within the Hub. The layout of the Hub is not designed to accommodate these requirements, and result in the areas of the Hub being occupied by a group of people. This does not provide a 'conducive area' for learning or recruitment; and adds to the overall noise and congestion. For some significant events held recently, DWP have had to take these off site as no appropriate space was available in the Guildhall.
- l) Due to lack of private meeting areas and congestion, both VCS and CAB often resort to taking customers to their own offices. There is a H&S risk should any difficulties with those customers arise; and the Council have had to provide security (SIA) support on a number of occasions, which present challenges as this means that security trained staff are occupied on upper floors, reducing available staff on the ground floor to deal with any situation. This risk is likely to increase when CAB actively start to provide UC support services from May 1st, as there is potential for an increase in visitor numbers. Discussions have been held with CAB, who are looking to produce their own risk management strategy. However the availability of private meetings rooms made available for medium to high risks customers in the Hub would greatly reduce the risk for all parties within the Guildhall.
- m) The relocation of LCC Adult and Children's services into the Guildhall has increased the number of more complex customers to the Hub. Whilst, LCC indicated that they did not require anything other than meet and greet facilities, the actual expectations of LCC staff within the building are beyond the leased arrangements. Problems with responses from LCC regarding drop-in visitors, and a number of incidents relating to LCC customers has prompted H&S concerns for Council Officers and other partner Customers; which is to be addressed with LCC.
- n) In relation to these more complex or difficult customers, (this can include those with mental health issues, on drink or drugs, safeguarding issues and those with disabilities), the layout of the Hub; the limitations of private meeting space, and the

provision of only a single entry/exit route does give rise to H&S concerns when incidents occur.

- o) There is no 'space' to allow for easy public consultations or promotional events, either in terms of wall space for information, or areas that customers can inspect information in relation to any consultations. This can include significant planning applications, which can attract much interest.
- p) The current IT provision is based on a range of PCs available for use.
 - a. The PCs are located along a long wall, meaning the use of the area in front of these PCs is limited.
 - b. As the PCs are in a long line, it is difficult for staff to keep an eye on customer use and whether there is inappropriate use of Public Computers.
 - c. The location of the PCs mean that screens are open for view by anyone in the near location. This puts Customers and the Council at risk if Customers are entering personal or sensitive information.
 - d. These PCs are not designed for 'service provision', and require knowledge of how to use the PC; and which websites to go to. As such, unless they are regular users, Customers require assistance to use the PCs. Previously digital volunteers were recruited to support customers in self-serving, funded by DWP. The funding was withdrawn in 2016 and since then it has fallen to Customer Service staff to support customers requiring that assistance. During busy times, it is difficult to retain this support in the current set-up; and customers are often put off using the PCs, limiting the Councils ability to encourage more digital enabled transactional capabilities.
 - e. They are not suitable for quick transactions, and this again limits the Councils ability to encourage more digital transactional capabilities; and to 'turnaround customers' quickly for simple transactions.
 - f. Payment capabilities are limited to the Payment Kiosk or utilising the online payment screens on these PCs, again reducing the ability to serve quick transaction customers.

Some other issues which the refurbishment could address include:

- q) There is no adjustment on lighting, which is stark and bright in areas. This can cause issues for some customers, for example those with autism find it difficult to function correctly in bright lights.
- r) In order for the area to be seen as a joined up space, branding was not originally included within the Hub. This has actually resulted in the opposite, with no visible presence of any partner organisation. This leads to confusion as to who is within the Hub, where and what they do. VCS and CAB often raise this as a limiting factor in their ability to work in partnership with the Council and DWP, and serve customers in the district, given their location on the first floor.

9. Annex 2 – Customer Feedback on the Customer Hub

1.	Privacy and Confidential issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't like the layout, it's not very private. • Use of rooms so that people aren't listening in on conversations. • Needs to be more private • It's big but has no privacy
2.	Reception & Initial Queuing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's too busy and no clear directions. • You need a queue area at reception • Reception desk not big enough • Desk 1 is too slow, too many people waiting and takes too long to get served. • No clear directions I was waiting for desk 1 for 40 mins. Thankfully a lady came out to sort it. • I don't like a lot about reception. Staff are ok though.
3.	Service Queuing & Wait Times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do something about waiting 2 hours for Home Choices • It wasn't very organised, nobody knew where to be, I had 4 people go up before me even though I was there 1st. It looked to me that the waiting area needs more people handling things when its busy to try and keep things organised. So people know where to go and who to see. • Not knowing who's turn it is in the queue or how long I am expected to wait. • Would be better if you could make appointments rather than drop-ins • The queue for housing benefit is long. • Waiting time for job centre • A ticket system for appointments would be good.
4.	Waiting Areas and Seating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't like the seating. • The seating isn't so nice • Never anywhere to sit • More chairs please • Two chairs at the desks please