

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

DECISION

meeting date: 21st JUNE 2022
title: REMODELLING OF RECEPTION AREA IN COUNCIL OFFICES -
EXEMPTION TO CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report an approval to make an exception to contract procedure rules.
- 1.2 To request approval of a new capital scheme in respect of the reception area in the council offices.
- 1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

Corporate Priorities -
 - To ensure the health and safety of all staff in their place of work.
 - To ensure best use of council resources in commissioning services.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council's standard approach to capital works is to plan expenditure ahead (for up to 5 years) and to ensure that resources are available to fund those schemes at the time of delivery.
- 2.2 No significant work to the reception area is included in the current capital programme, following a substantial redesign award six years ago.

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 During the various lockdown periods since March 2020, the Council offices have been closed to the public. In line with most other service providers, however, we have moved towards "business as usual" and reopened for public access.
- 3.2 Although there is a lower level of personal visits to the offices than pre-pandemic, our staff do handle a variety of enquiries each day. Most visitors to the offices are responsible and well-behaved.
- 3.3 Occasionally, visitors to the offices can become frustrated or angry and staff are sometimes subjected to verbal abuse. This is never taken lightly, and over the years the Police have been called to attend in the more extreme cases.
- 3.4 Earlier this year, one visitor (with a known history of violence) became so angry in the reception area that the staff on duty behind the reception counter became concerned for their safety.
- 3.5 In the course of the debrief after that situation had been resolved, the staff involved explained their concerns to their Head of Service, suggesting that it would be possible for an assailant to access easily the area behind the counter.

- 3.6 The Head of Service (and subsequently Corporate Management Team) took those concerns seriously and put in place a temporary arrangement where staff on Reception operate from the cash office, which is secure. This arrangement is unsustainable in the long term because of the limited space in that office, so alternatives were explored.
- 3.7 The longer-term solution agreed by CMT was to adapt and improve the security screens in the reception area, so quotes were invited, and a contractor appointed to carry out the work. At the time of writing, the work is under way.
- 3.8 Post-lockdown, some contractors have cut back their workloads and there appears to be a lot of work available. In addition, some of the materials needed are in short supply. For these reasons, only one firm offer was received for this project.
- 3.9 Because of the importance (and growing urgency, given the cramped conditions in the cash office) of this piece of work, an application was made for an exemption from normal contract procedure rules (CPR) under CPR 5 to waive the requirement to get at least two written quotes. The exemption to CPR was approved by the Director of Resources and the Head of Legal Services as required.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – Whilst only one quote was received, your technical staff have assessed the process as representing reasonable value for money, considering the work involved.
The total cost of the scheme is anticipated to be £13,500 and it is recommended that this is added to the 2022/23 capital programme. It is recommended that this is funded from the repairs and maintenance earmarked reserve which currently has a balance of £17.7k at 1 April 2022.
- Political – There are no direct implications, other than a clear message that the Council takes seriously the welfare and safety of staff.
- Reputation – This measure should enhance the Council's reputation as a good employer.
- Equality & Diversity – There are no major risks identified.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The order was placed, and the work is being carried out to the high standard expected. The reception area will soon be able to revert to operating in the way it is intended to and this will ease the pressure on the cash office, possibly reducing waiting times for some visitors back to previous levels.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 6.1 Approve the new capital scheme for the remodelling of the reception area in the council offices at a cost of £13,500 to be funded from the repairs and maintenance earmarked reserve.

JOHN HEAP
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

For further information please ask for John Heap, extension 4461.