

Extract of Cabinet minutes dated 17 January 2012

9 Proposed Creation of Central Devizes Customer Access Point and the Closure of Browfort, Urchfont Manor and Bradley Road Buildings

Public Participation

Written representations were received from the following members of the public in the form of questions and statements, details of which were circulated:

Nicola Mitchell, Chairman of Urchfont Parish Council

Celia Bell, Student Representative on the Urchfont Management Board

Diane Kerchevall

Dr Jennifer Johnson-Jones, Bedfordshire

Elizabeth Ann Hunter

Hilary M Garrett, Burnley

Jacky Attridge, Shrivenham, Oxon

Lyn Hamilton, Student at Urchfont, South Cadbury

Michele Lomas, Marlborough

Mr Arnold Lowrey, Cardiff

Mr and Mrs Hopkins

Mr John Blunden, Urchfont

Mr C P Cook

Mr Richard Hawkins

Mr Robert Hughes FRCS

Mr G J Skinner CBE

Janet Crowther, Kent

Mrs Mair Edwards

Mrs Nina Guilfoyle

Ms Catherine Brown

Ms Lorna Abel, Southampton

Ms Norah Kennedy

Ms Penny Copland-Griffiths

Ms Stella Hall

Ms Valerie Oxley, Nottinghamshire

Nicola Vesey Williams

Mr Nigel Partridge

Sally Boehme and Clifford Johnson

various members of Staff at Urchfont Manor:

Eleanor Young, Dianne Hayward, Margaret Simper, Catherine Brown, Dionne Surman, Christine Bozier, Audrey Laurie, Jessica Scull, Marie Smith, Sharon Davies, Christel Smart, John Young, Pete Rutt and Martin Brown

Various students and tutors at Urchfont Manor: Hazel Credland, Valerie Oxley and Arnold Lowrey

The Leader also referred to a late submission from Mr Chris Howes

Verbal representations were also made at the meeting by:

Nicola Mitchell, Chairman of Urchfont Parish Council
Mr David Motram
Mr John Blunden
Mr Peter Newell
Mr Cairns Langland
Mr Robert W Giles
Mrs Wendy Trinder
Mr Nigel Partridge

Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cabinet Member for Campus Development and Culture (including Leisure, Sport and Libraries) presented a report which sought approval to create a customer access facility in central Devizes, provide hot desking facilities in the Devizes area and provide an alternative Ceremony Room to service the Devizes area.

The report also sought approval to undertake the work necessary to cease using and to dispose of the buildings known as the Browfort offices (to include The Cedars, The Beeches, The Yew Trees and The Lodge), the Bradley Road offices and Urchfont Manor.

The Bradley Road offices had previously been intended for phased closure as part of the council's wider transformation programme and early closure could be achieved, bringing a benefit to the council's revenue budget.

The Browfort offices would no longer be required due to a combination of reduced staffing levels and furtherance of the hot desking model of 3:2 desk ratio. In Trowbridge, the Council's office accommodation would be in the refurbished County Hall building, which would include a new Trowbridge Library and integrated customer access provision.

Urchfont Manor was currently used to deliver a significant part of the council's informal adult learning provision although it was noted that adult education was also provided at other sites and by other providers such as Wiltshire College.

In keeping with the Council's commitment to localise its service delivery and recent national guidance from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Adult Education Service would be consulting on the development of a revised service being provided at a local level.

Cllr Lionel Grundy Cabinet member for Children's Services explained that courses being run from Urchfont Manor (the provision of which were not a statutory function) were operating at a loss of approximately £120,000 per annum. Furthermore, Urchfont Manor was not accessible by public transport and was therefore not in keeping with localised service delivery. He also explained that the Council's budget for the Children and Education services was under constant pressure due to the

growing number of children at risk. The priority therefore had to be the protection of vulnerable children.

Following a query by the Leader, Cllr Toby Sturgis, Cabinet member for Waste, Property, Environment and Development Control Services explained that in accordance with the Council's normal approach, a specialist agent would be engaged for the disposal of such a property if agreed by Cabinet. This would ensure that the property was extensively marketed at the widest possible range of potential purchasers.

In response to representations by the public, the Leader put forward an additional recommendation in respect of securing continued community access as far as possible of the area around Urchfont Manor.

Cllr Jeff Osborn expressed concern that the Urchfont Management Committee of which he was a member, had not met to consider these proposals. The Leader explained that the Management Committee was at liberty to convene its meetings as and when it considered it appropriate to do so.

Following a lengthy debate and having heard contributions from members of the Council and members of the public to which members of Cabinet responded, it was

Resolved:

- a) To delegate to Dr Carlton Brand, Corporate Director, in consultation with Cllr Stuart Wheeler, Cabinet Member for Campus Development and Culture (including Leisure, Sport and Libraries) the authority to:**
 - i. undertake all necessary actions to secure, develop and deliver a new customer access site in central Devizes as well as providing hot desk facilities and an alternative Ceremony Room in the Devizes area;**
 - ii. instruct officers within the Transformation Programme to commence the necessary consultation with key stakeholders and staff to enable the closure of Browfort offices during autumn 2012;**
 - iii. complete the early closure of Bradley Road in autumn 2012, ensuring the relocation of the current customer access facility to the refurbished County Hall ensuring these complement the new Library and other customer facilities within the refurbished building;**
 - iv. undertake the required actions to secure the closure of Urchfont Manor by the end of September 2012. Recognising that future Adult Education Service provision including, where required, local flexible delivery in line with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills strategic proposals for Further Education and Skills, will be determined by Cabinet after consultation with service users, area boards, local communities and partners;**

- v. **market and dispose of the Bradley Road offices and Urchfont Manor sites as part of the Transformation Programme;**
 - vi. **market and dispose of the Browfort offices site if officers cannot develop an appropriate, financially viable, alternative long term public service use for the site, such as use by another public body or Extra Care provision;**
 - vii. **ask the Chief Financial Officer to ensure that the overall savings generated by these proposals are identified and tracked within the council's budget setting process and the costs of the alternative provision is properly reflected and funded in the councils capital and revenue budgets;**
- b) That when disposing of Urchfont Manor, officers working with the community, take whatever steps are necessary to ensure continued community access and management of Oakfrith Wood, appropriate ongoing access by the school and community to the playing fields to the north of the Manor House and as far as is practicable, long term use of the existing cricket pitch by the Cricket Club. These arrangements are to be structured after negotiation with the successful purchaser in a manner that allows the council to achieve the maximum capital receipt whilst ensuring ongoing community use and access with completion of these negotiations to be delegated to the Corporate Director (Dr Carlton Brand) following consultation with the Cabinet member for Waste, Property, Environment and Development Control Services.**

Reasons for decision

There are four main drivers behind these decisions:-

- 1 To create a town centre customer access location within Devizes. This will complement the council's commitment to deliver services by 'taking them to the customer' and help support foot fall into central Devizes, recognising the importance of this key Market Town and the current economic climate.
- 2 To reflect the smaller staff base across the council following the reduction in 412 staff positions during the Business Plan period 2011 to date, the reconfiguration of some services and the need for less office accommodation now that staff are able to work flexibly following the successful deployment of the council's new ICT provision. .
- 3 To respond to the current economic climate and ongoing budget pressures, whilst enabling the council to continue to invest in, and protect, front line service delivery by further rationalising and modernising its property portfolio.
- 4 To continue the delivery of the councils' policy to ensure all its property holdings are sustainable, fit for purpose, and represent value for money for Wiltshire residents, both now and in the future.