

REPORT FROM: CORPORATE DIRECTOR
TO: SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT TEAM
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TRANSFER OF SERVICES AND FACILITIES TO TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To present, for information, an overview of progress with the programme of transfers to town and parish councils.

Introduction

1. For the last four years the Council has been engaged on a programme of transfers of facilities and services to town and parish councils. The programme has been managed by the Executive through the all-party Transfer of Services and Facilities to Town and Parish Councils Committee. Numerous meetings have been held with town and parish councils collectively and individually to explain the Council's financial position and the rationale for the programme. The response from them has generally been very positive.
2. In summary the rationale for the programme is as follows.
3. Firstly the requirement to make substantial revenue savings means that the Council can no longer afford to deliver those facilities and services itself but rather than simply cease them it has wished to find other means of retaining them. The ability of town and parish councils to raise their council tax precepts and their appetite to take on local facilities and services has presented a means of doing this.
4. Secondly with the ever present possibility of a reorganisation of local government on the horizon and Pendle being subsumed in a larger and more distant authority, placing the facilities and services with town and parish councils is a way of ensuring they remain in local control.
5. In the first two years the programme covered **community halls** (the community centre and town hall in Brierfield; the civic hall in Barnoldswick; Primet community centre in Colne) together with the community centre in Trawden which was transferred to a specially created

community interest company.

6. The first two years also saw **public conveniences** in Barley, Barnoldswick, Barrowford, Earby, Goldshaw Booth and Laneshaw Bridge transferred. Responsibility for **festive decorations and local events** also became the responsibility of parishes.
7. The **2015/16** programme was as follows:

Play areas and MUGAs

8. This covers the facilities which are located outside our parks. With the exception of Brierfield they have been transferred apart from a couple where there are land ownership issues still being resolved. In the case of Brierfield the town council has held off taking a transfer for the time being.
9. In most cases the parish or town council is paying the Council the cost of maintenance and inspection (£1293 per facility per annum). This includes Brierfield. The exceptions are Colne and Foulridge who have made their own arrangements.

Passenger bus shelters

10. This covers all the passenger shelters in the Borough (other than those included in a contract with the advertising company, Primesight, which is about to end and is currently the subject of discussion with the company). All the town and parish councils concerned with the exception of Nelson have agreed to take the transfer of these though in some cases the legal documentation remains to be completed.
11. All those taking transfer are carrying out their own maintenance with the exceptions of Barnoldswick and Brierfield who are paying the Council the cost of maintenance (£106.38 per shelter per annum).

Roadside Seats

11. All the Council's roadside seats were transferred to town and parish councils with effect from 1st October 2015.

Rights of way (Countryside Access)

12. All parish and town councils were given the opportunity of taking up a voluntary subscription scheme through which they will receive an enhanced service. The amount of the subscription is related to the length of the network in their area. Six have done so.

CCTV

13. For 2016/17 the Council decided to cease providing and operating its town centre CCTV systems with a budget saving of £87,000.
14. At the same time it approved a new scheme involving a move to a new East Lancashire monitoring hub at King George's Hall in Blackburn. This went live on 1st December 2016. The other partners are Burnley, Hyndburn, Blackburn and Preston. The scheme is also supported by the Police and Crime Commissioner.
15. The five town councils were asked to take on the revenue costs of the new scheme as there was no longer funding from the Council. Barnoldswick, Brierfield, Earby and Nelson agreed to do so whilst Colne has decided to set up its own system for the town.

Current programme

16. The main feature of the current programme is the transfer of parks. Discussions have taken place collectively and individually with the councils concerned. Barnoldswick and Barrowford have indicated their wish to move towards transfer with a target date of 31st March 2018 and the Council has agreed to this.
17. The transfer issue is closely related to the 25% reduction in the budget for grounds maintenance in parks approved by the Council in December. At this point we are awaiting the decisions of the town and parish councils as to their potential contributions to the overall £90,000 reduction and also on the transfer question.
18. Also in the current programme is the transfer of the Town Hall to Colne Town Council who are applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a large grant. It is expected the transfer will occur later this year once a number of complex issues have been resolved.
19. A number of other ad hoc but important facilities e.g. Unity Hall Nelson; Fence Village Hall; Springfield and Hill Top playing fields, the Youth Hostel and the former Council offices in Earby; Pendle Heritage Centre, Barrowford are also being dealt with under the programme.
20. Via area committees and town and parish councils themselves lists of miscellaneous small pieces of land for potential transfer have been agreed and further discussion and work on the legal documentation is underway.

Future programme and developments

21. Whilst parks and Colne Town Hall will continue to be the main features of the programme in the next two to three years other possibilities for consideration are indoor and outdoor markets, leisure facilities, car parks, town centre sweeping and recreation grounds.
22. The Council has been keen to liaise closely with parishes so that they could plan their budgets accordingly. One net result of the programme for many of them has been significant increases in their precepts.
23. The Financial Services Manager recently circulated to all councillors details of the latest Government thinking on this which suggests it may introduce some form of capping increases. Most of our town and parish councils are significantly under the suggested thresholds relating to overall expenditure and size of Band D precepts. There is also a suggestion that increases which are genuinely down to transfers of responsibility for services or facilities will be exempt.
24. The Government is however keeping the whole issue under review and town and parish councils and ourselves will need to watch developments.
25. Councillors will appreciate that the current and future programme requires considerable work for all concerned. The nature of the services and facilities to be transferred is more complex and requires more time spent on untangling and disaggregating the way they are currently provided.
26. The future pace will continue to be dependent on the capacity and resources of town and parish councils but Councillors and senior officers must continue to give it high priority in the light of the financial challenge of around £4.7 million savings required over the next three years.