

## **Agenda Item 12 - Council presence at Belper Library**

### **Approval/Noting**

For Approval

### **Purpose of the Report**

To report back on the request from the Facilities Committee to investigate whether there was any available space at the Library for the Council to display information or provide outreach facilities.

### **Background Information**

Members of the Facilities Committee held on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020 resolved to investigate whether any space was available at the new Library building to maintain a Council presence there.

Officers have held e mail discussions with colleagues in the Derbyshire County Council Library Service and Adult Health and Social Care teams and have been informed of the following :

1. The Library can make space available for the Council to display leaflets and other publications, of interest to residents and visitors. However, at the present time, due to COVID restrictions they will not allow this to happen due to the risk of spreading the infection. Once restrictions have been lifted then discussions about making space available for displays can take place and it has been agreed to speak again once this has taken place.
2. County Council colleagues were supportive of the suggestion that a video screen could be located in the cafeteria area to provide rolling information about the Council, the Town and events etc. Once open it is expected that the cafeteria would be well used by residents and visitors and therefore the Council could maintain a useful electronic presence in the building. It was advised, however, that the County Council have no funds to provide such a facility but would be interested in receiving a proposal from the Town Council for providing the equipment and content.

This proposal opens up a wider point about the Council's approach to communication with residents and visitors and what are the most effective methods of promoting the Council and informing the public about its work in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. There is a recommendation relating to this aspect further in this report.

3. There is currently no space available in the ground floor area for the Council to provide a physical presence e.g. a "hot desk" where a Belper Town Council employee could work and be available to provide customer contact advice. There is a meeting room ( see attached pictures ) but this is a fairly small space and likely to be used regularly by Library and Health and Care Staff once the building is fully operational. It was agreed to keep this matter under review.

4. A speculative enquiry was also made as to whether any back office space was available in the building big enough to support the re location of the Council officer team. The response was that space in the building is fully utilized either by Library or Health and Social Care Staff.

This matter does open up the wider question about where might be the best place for the Council to maintain a physical presence. With the Council just about to approve a draft Accessibility Strategy it could well be called in to question as to whether the current location of the Council Offices in St John's Church has suitable access arrangements for all Members of the Community. It would send out a very positive message if the Council were to set a good example with its own facilities by having a public office which was fully accessible to all. There is a recommendation relating to this aspect further in the report.

#### **Legislation**

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Disability Act 2010 contain requirements for public authorities to do all they can to avoid discrimination and include requirements to make "reasonable adjustments" to make physical spaces accessible to all.

#### **Financial Implications**

None directly.

#### **Recommendation(s)**

It is recommended that the Council:

1. In the short term maintains a dialogue with the Library about space being made available for leaflets and other information about the Council and the Town at the Library.
2. Carries out a review of the Council's approach to communication and customer contact in order to ensure that the Council's approach is fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The review to include an examination of all communication methods.( e.g. paper based, electronic etc )
3. Considers reviewing the Council's accommodation requirements with a view to ensuring that Accessibility Strategy requirements are fully satisfied

#### **Reasons for recommendation(s)**

The Council wishes to improve its communication to residents and visitors and work in accordance with its policy on Accessibility.