

REPORT FROM: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE
TO: RESTRUCTURING COMMITTEE
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Report Author: Philip Mousdale
Tel. No: 01282 661634
E-mail: Philip.mousdale@pendle.gov.uk

TRANSFER of SERVICES/FACILITIES to TOWN and PARISH COUNCILS

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To review the approach to town and parish councils on the potential for the transfer to them of services and facilities.

RECOMMENDATION

That the approach, programme and timetable in the report be approved.

Background

1. The Council is keen to engage with parish and town councils for them to take over certain services and facilities. There are essentially three reasons for this.
2. Firstly with the severe financial constraints the Council is facing there is increasing pressure on these services and facilities; at the same time there is more flexibility for town and parish councils to increase their resources by raising their precepts whereas the Council's scope for increasing Council Tax is severely limited. This is likely to continue for some time.
3. Secondly with the possibility of a move to larger unitary councils on the horizon passing these facilities and services to town and parish councils should help in keeping them in local control.
4. Thirdly it is apparent that some town and parish councils have increased appetite to take on more services and facilities.
5. There has already been some engagement with town and parish councils around this. A meeting of Executive members with all town and parish councils was held in July 2013. Subsequently there were meetings with individual town councils (Nelson, Colne, Barnoldswick, Brierfield and Earby).

6. There were also more specific meetings and discussions involving those councils with community centres in their area (Barnoldswick, Trawden, Brierfield and Colne) and public conveniences (Colne, Barnoldswick, Earby, Brierfield, Barrowford, Laneshaw Bridge, Trawden, Barley, Salterforth, Kelbrook and Sough and Newchurch). Finally there have been discussions concerning miscellaneous issues eg Earby taking over the Council offices and Barnoldswick taking over its Memorial Gardens and Town Square.
7. There is now a need to put all this process on a firmer footing with a more comprehensive and coordinated approach so that both the Council and town and parish councils can understand and agree the future direction and expectations of each other and make the necessary plans.

What is already underway

8. Town Councils are now taking on responsibility for local events.
9. Funding for Festive Decorations is now split between area committees and town and parish councils).
10. Since 1st April this year public conveniences have become the responsibility of some town and parish councils with transfer documentation to be completed shortly.
11. Approval has been given for the transfers of Barnoldswick Civic Hall, Brierfield Community and Brierfield Town Hall with a target date of 30th September for handovers.

What could be the future programme?

2015/16

Play areas and MUGAs not located in Parks (an internal review of these already underway).
 Bus shelters (those owned by PBC).
 Town Centre CCTV

2016/17

Markets Indoor and Outdoor
 Car parks (existing example of Barley)
 Town centre sweeping
 Miscellaneous (eg. Picnic sites, Colne Council Shop, Discover Pendle, Fence Village Hall)

2017/18

Leisure sports facilities, eg. Pendle Leisure Centre
 Leisure arts facilities, eg. Municipal Hall
 Parks and recreation grounds
 Cemeteries

12. It will be apparent that the programme becomes progressively more complex. For example a play area is very local in character and clearly defined. It would be a comparatively simple matter for a town or parish council either to take over the facility and/or contribute to the Council's costs of maintenance and management of it.

13. A market or car park operation is more problematic. Taking over what is currently a Leisure Trust facility is even more so both in the nature of its operation and the potential models for doing so.
14. Alongside this is the issue of the capacity and resources of town or parish councils. Their councillors are volunteers. Most simply employ a part time clerk and financial officer and may have a handyman or lengthsman. Inevitably they need some time to build up their manpower and financial resources with some difficult decisions along the way.
15. There will be a need for the Council to provide practical support and assistance at various levels throughout discussions and handover and Senior Management needs to ensure that this needs is recognised by staff involved in the process.
16. The Council will need to work hard to maintain the momentum and the pace of the programme giving it the required priority.
17. The all out town and parish elections in May 2015 may have an impact on town and parish councils' considerations and on the pace of the programme.

Equity

18. There may be concerns about the equity and fairness of the programme and process.
19. For example a facility may be located in a particular town or parish council area but residents from other areas clearly benefit from it with a feeling that they should take on a share of the burden. This throws up the possibility and desirability of neighbouring councils forming partnerships to take over the running of a facility with agreements as to the financial commitments.
20. Similarly there may be concerns if some town and parish councils do not take on the programme with its additional commitments either at all or at differing paces.
21. Nevertheless despite the above difficulties the development of a clearly understood three year programme would enable future planning for both the Council and the town and parish councils. Each town and parish council would need to take its own decisions but the aim would be that with a clearly articulated programme and the thinking behind it a reasonably common approach would be adopted by them.

Process of Communication and Consultation

22. Communication and consultation will be of key importance.
23. The first step would be for the Council to undertake detailed work to clarify exactly what is its offer in each case. In doing so it needs to understand what the impacts are likely to be on its own service delivery arrangements including its staffing levels and allocations.
24. It then needs to communicated clearly the offer to the town and parish councils with the necessary supporting information.
25. Decisions by town and parish councils would be needed in time for precepts and budgets to be finalised. Detailed work would then be needed to finalise

agreements/transfers and the practicalities of hand over where appropriate.

26. For the items in 2015/16 this would seem relatively simple. The experience gained would then help in dealing with the later, more complex items.
27. It will be apparent that not all the town and parish councils will be involved in each and every part of the programme. Indeed it will generally speaking be the larger more urban councils who will be most involved.
28. It would seem advisable however to start by explaining the programme to all of them and getting an in principle "sign up" at a meeting similar to that in July last year. A standing forum could be set up with say 6-monthly meetings on progress. The aim would be to generate consensus and as equitable an approach as possible.
29. Separate meetings would then be required with those councils who are involved with each part of the programme. These may then need to be followed up with more informal meetings with individual councils.
30. All this will mean a considerable commitment of time and effort for town and parish councillors and their clerks and for Pendle Members and Lead officers.
31. There are differing influences on town and parish councils (including political influences in some cases) and an all party approach from the Council's side may be useful. It may also be useful to involve say Area Committee chairmen as well as Executive members bearing in mind the existing involvement of Area Committees in some of the services and facilities in the programme.
32. At the same time care needs to be taken that the process does not become unwieldy or too time consuming.

Suggested Timetable

Early October - Meeting with all town and parish councils
Mid October to end November - Meetings with those town and parish councils involved in 2015/16 programme
End January – decisions taken by town and parish councils
End February – Council budget agreed
April - handover
June – Meeting with all town and parish councils and commencement of process for 2016/17 programme

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: The Council's emerging policy is to seek to pass to town and parish councils facilities and services where appropriate and possible.

Financial: Transfer of facilities and services to town and parish councils is part of the wider process of achieving savings in the Council's revenue budget.

Legal: None arising directly from the report.

Risk Management: None arising directly from the report.

Health and Safety: None arising directly from the report.

Sustainability: None arising directly from the report.

Community Safety: None arising directly from the report.

Equality and Diversity: None arising directly from the report.