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| SUBJECT: | Additional Interview Room |
| REPORT OF: | Officer Management Team - Director of Services Prepared by - Head of Environment |

1. Purpose of Report

To consider whether an additional interview room should be constructed at Capswood.

2. Links to Council Policy Objectives

2.1 This matter contributes to the Council's aim to deliver value for money services that are driven by customer and community needs.

3. Background

3.1 There are currently two interview rooms in the reception area of Capswood2. These are used mainly by the Revenues & Benefits and Housing sections.

3.2 The number of interviews held by Revenues & Benefits has increased significantly. It is proving very difficult to find time for all of the interviews using the two rooms currently available.

3.3 At their meeting on 12th September 2013, Members of the Resources PAG discussed a report which outlined options for creating an additional interview room near the reception area. Following the meeting the Portfolio Holder agreed to recommend to Cabinet that Option A (shown at appendix A) should be agreed in principle and that a further report demonstrating the need for additional space and the actual costs be submitted to a future meeting of the PAG.

4. Proposal/Discussion

4.1 The need for a second interview room has arisen due to increased numbers of visitors who have more complex or sensitive enquires. This is evidenced by looking at one particular service, Revenues and Benefits. Recent changes in legislation, as a result of the Government's welfare reform programme, have led to periods of increased visitor numbers. There have also been longer visit times due to the nature of the enquiries. This is shown in the table at appendix B.

- 4.2 The table shows that visitor numbers increased significantly in February and March 2013 when changes were implemented. Although visitor numbers have stabilised since that time, the total time in hours has remained higher showing that visit times have increased. As these visits have to be completed in an interview room they illustrate that there is need for an additional room. For example figures for July 2013 show 100 hours of visits. This equates to 25 hours per week. Visits are not made solely by appointment so at some points more than one visitor will attend at the same time.
- 4.3 The interview rooms are also used for interviews under caution and these have to be compliant with Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE). Numbers of these interviews have also increased over this financial year. In 2012/13 we held 53 of these interviews. In 2013/14 to date, we have held 56 and so last year's figures have already been exceeded. These interviews are extremely important to enable us to pursue fraudulent activity. On occasions lack of available interview rooms have led to us having to complete these interviews off-site. This makes it more difficult for some customers to attend as they have to arrange to travel outside the District for example to Wycombe Job Centre.
- 4.4 The impact of welfare reform is far reaching and has affected other services in addition to Revenues and Benefits such as Housing. In order to evaluate this to some extent, Reception staff have monitored all occasions where a customer has had to wait to be seen due to an interview room not being available. This was monitored from 17 September until 13 November 2013 and during that period there were at least 24 occasions where customers were unable to be seen as there was not an interview room available.
- 4.5 The service reviews are also identifying changes that could potentially lead to an increased number of visitors to South Bucks District Council (for example if a service has a primary base here). The introduction of Universal Credit and our participation in Local Support Services Framework will also result in us supporting those customers who are not able to access Universal Credit on-line. It is also likely that we will be required to offer advice on the process of claiming and other areas such as budgeting advice. These changes all have potential to lead to increased demand for interview facilities in the future.
- 4.6 Officers have received two quotes for constructing the additional interview room. Company A has stated £8,913 and Company B £3,686. In addition up to £2,000 will need to be set aside for electrical work, furniture and office moves.
- 4.7 Northgate will require additional space to compensate for having the interview room in their present office area. The plan is for Northgate to take over the area currently used by Community Impact Bucks. CIB have

reduced the number of desks they require at Capswood and will desk share with CAB staff.

5. Resources, Risks and other implications

- 5.1 Any proposed funding must come from revenue reserves.
- 5.2 The need for an additional room is based on the assumption that there will be a long term increase in the number of interviews needed rather than a short term spike.
- 5.3 There will be a loss of space but this will be compensated by Community Impact giving up their current desk space.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 The advice of the PAG is sought on whether the Portfolio Holder should recommend to Cabinet that an additional interview room should be created at Capswood at an estimated cost of £6,000 to be met from revenue reserves.

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| Background Papers: | none |