



Report to Leader (Communities portfolio)

Decision Date:	13 December 2021
Reference number:	CO03.21
Title:	Wycombe Resource Zone
Cabinet Member(s):	Councillor Steve Bowles
Contact officer:	Gideon Springer - Community Safety Head of Service gideon.springer@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
Ward(s) affected:	All
Recommendations:	To decommission the Wycombe Resource Zone and work with local community environmental projects to share knowledge and residual stock

Reason for decision:

Wycombe Resource Zone is a scrap store that has seen decline in use and loss in income over several years which is unsustainable. Significant investment would be needed to make it viable. Scrap stores are traditionally seen as part of the voluntary community sector and considerable efforts have been made to see if this was a solution. However, no offers have come forward to take the service as it stands.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 A scrap store collects scrap materials donated by local businesses for re-use as art, craft and play materials.
- 1.2 On vesting day the legacy scrap store transferred as part of the Community Safety Team. After the civic response to the pandemic, a review of the service highlighted the scrap store had been running at a loss for a number of years and membership declined.
- 1.3 The service does not break even and runs at a considerable loss. Significant investment including remodelling would be required which, without an evidence

base of need, may not justify any investment. The building is part of the council's estate which if released could be an opportunity for commercial interest.

- 1.4 Scrap stores are not a statutory requirement. The service is not a Community Safety priority or a critical component of other service and council priorities.
- 1.5 There has been a general decline in scrap stores across the country, those that are still in operation are run by the voluntary community sector. Work has been done to explore if the voluntary sector may be interested. However, there were no expressions of interest for running a scrap store. The High Wycombe Community Board environmental sub group have identified a connection to a local environmental group who may be interested in incorporating some aspects into their project work including utilising residual stock. This could be recognition of an unsustainable model coupled with the rising number of smaller recycling opportunities which generate scrap materials suitable for crafts.
- 1.2 It is recommended that with the decline in need, loss of income and absence of any viable alternatives that the scrap store is decommissioned. It is recommended that as part of the decommissioning process that staff work with the Environmental Centre in High Wycombe to share learning and residual stock.

2. Wycombe Resource Zone

- 2.1 Wycombe Resource Zone (WRZ) is located within Cressex Industrial Estate. One part time coordinator manages the service with the support of 2 volunteers. The service operates:
 - Monday 9am – 1pm
 - Thursday 4pm – 6pm
 - Friday 9am – 1pm
 - last Saturday of the month (not Bank Holiday weekends) 10.30am - 12.30
- 2.3 The coordinator is responsible for payments, registrations and donations. Volunteer's support managing stock, customers as well as making displays or crafts as examples to visitors. The coordinator is managed by the Community Safety Manager.
- 2.4 The costs of running the service are largely staffing and overheads such as utilities and building maintenance at a total of £51,000 p.a. exclusive of management time.

2.5 The service operates on a membership basis

Membership fees		
	Within Buckinghamshire	Outside Buckinghamshire
Groups (<i>typically a craft group or school</i>)	£63	£78
Individuals	£41.50	£46.50
One-off visits	£41.50	£52

2.6 Over the last ten years there has been a reduction in the people renewing their membership or joining WRZ, which has impacted on the income. The pandemic impacted on both the ability to open and demand.

2.7 During 2020 there were approximately 110 members, figures for past years are not available due to the IT system in place. Whilst there have been some members who have renewed their membership during 2020, the income this year has reduced significantly. Following covid restrictions lifting WRZ received an income of £589 in September, and £784 in October. Due to COVID income for 2020 may be as little as £1,500.

Annual income					
2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
£10,912	£9,8000	£9,581	£7,276	£6,946	£6,329

2.8 The building will need improvements and upgraded IT which will add to the deficit given the unsustainable model. Property Services have identified it would be possible to make alternative use of the premises given it is on the popular Cressex Industrial Estate. Re-use of the asset may enable the Council to increase the revenue it generates from the unit.

3.0 Considerations

3.1 Although under the management of Community Safety a scrap store is not a key priority for the service which focuses on antisocial behaviour, emergency responses, domestic abuse and modern slavery amongst others. It also does not fit elsewhere in the council's priorities.

3.2 Recognising this is not a sustainable model, efforts turned to explore opportunities with external providers given scrap stores still in operation are typically ran by the voluntary community sector. This approach was tried by the legacy Wycombe District Council however no organisation took up the offer and the Council continued to operate the service at a loss.

- 3.3 To support conversations this year a proposal was taken to the VCS Recovery Board in February to consider if there may be an organisation within Buckinghamshire that would be interested in operating the service. Unfortunately, no service was identified either through the meeting, or in a subsequent follow ups.
- 3.4 Discussions have been held with the local Community Board to ensure local groups understood the current position and consider possibilities. Local members were made aware and upon request a further engagement period has taken place.
- 3.5 Given there has been no interest, the increasing overhead costs and worsening revenue position it is recommended that WRZ be decommissioned. It is estimated this would take 3 months. The staff member and volunteers would be supported to find other opportunities where possible, notifications would go to current members and there would be a period of stock clearance. Any remaining stock would be donated to local groups, other scrap stores in the country or taken to the local recycling centre.

4.0 Corporate Implications

- 4.1 There are no legal implications. If a suitable alternative role could not be found redundancy costs would apply.

5.0 Communication, engagement & further consultation

- 5.1 As listed above there have been attempts made to seek alternative providers but this has not come to fruition. Discussions have taken place with local members and the suggestion of a delayed Leader decision to allow further engagement discussion has happened.
- 5.2 In August 2021 the Cabinet Member informed the local Members (Cllr Clarke, Cllr Hussain and Cllr Alam) of concerns around the unsustainable model, initial voluntary sector engagement and the proposal of decommissioning.
- 5.3 Local members were keen for the Cabinet Member to delay any decision and hold further engagement utilising the Community Board links. A meeting was held on the 9th September where the Community Board Environment Sub Group thought aspects of the WRZ could be delivered through working with the Environment Centre charity based in High Wycombe.
- 5.4 Discussions have continued over several months. The group would not be able to take the service in its current format but are potentially interested in linking to their environmental projects including stock supply.

6.0 Next steps and review

- 6.1 Upon decision the service will move to be decommissioned. Discussions will continue with High Wycombe Community Board's environmental sub group and the Environment Centre on their plans for future project work and transfer of stock. WRZ staff will also support with sharing knowledge which may help future plans. In the New Year those groups, organisations and individuals who had previously been members of Wycombe Resource Zone will be contacted to receive an update including the Environment centre plans or an offer to collect any remaining stock directly.

7.0 Background papers

- 7.1 None

8.0 Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 8.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone 01296 382343 or email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk.

