Report to Cabinet

Options to redesign the Link Centre Service

Portfolio Holder:
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Reason for Decision
As part of the Council’s budget planning process officers were asked to explore an option to decommission the Link Centre Service and explore future options for the use of the building, to enable adult social care to achieve £250,000 of savings during the 2017/2018 financial year.

A period of public and partner consultation commenced on 6 September 2016 and lasted for 12 weeks; through to 29 November 2016.

The consultation sought views and ideas on how the council could achieve the proposed level of savings, and those ideas which were viable to pursue, along with options identified by the council, and are presented in the section 3.

This report outlines potential options for the Link Centre Service, following this period of consultation and recommends a preferred option and the implications of this option on achieving the budget reduction of £250,000 of savings in 2017/2018.

Executive Summary
As part of the Council’s budget planning process officers were asked to explore an option to decommission the Link Centre Service and explore future options for the use of the building, to enable adult social care to achieve £250,000 of savings during the 2017/2018 financial year.
A period of public and partner consultation commenced on 6th September 2016 and lasted for 12 weeks; through to 29th November 2016 (the findings of the consultation are documented in section 5 and Appendix 4 & 4a for Members consideration.)

The consultation sought views and ideas on how the council could achieve the proposed level of savings, and those ideas which were viable to pursue, along with options identified by the council, and are presented in the section 3.

As a result of the consultation activity 2 petitions entitled ‘Petition against the Link Centre Closure’ have been submitted to the council containing in total between them 1,859 signatures. Both of these petitions have been addressed via the council’s Petitions Protocol.

This report outlines the current position, in relation to the role of the Link Centre Service in our borough, as well as options for the future usage of the building.

It should be noted that the main focus of this report is from a service delivery perspective and is driven by the requirement to mitigate any potential negative impact on affected protected characteristic groups. A full equality impact assessment is available at Appendix 3.

The Link Centre was opened in 2000, and renamed as Phillip Harrison House in 2014. At the time the focus of the services provided was in relation to people with a physical disability, and as such many activities were carried out on the ground floor. The building has been developed to be very accessible. Since then the scope of service provision has changed to include a wider range of vulnerable groups and services including:

- Translation and interpretation, both for the council and external agencies
- Accessible community facilities for health and social care services
- Volunteering for all project
- Sensory room
- Bathing facilities
- Assessment rooms for moving and handling and occupational therapy
- Drop-in events, such as for carers
- Information, advice and signposting
- Aids to enable people to live independently, via the Age UK shop
- Support to health and social care groups

Whilst the Link Centre has been operating for some time it is perceived as having been in decline for the past couple of years. Footfall is down, the Centre is underused, and people report a lack of atmosphere and focus.

As a result, a service review was commissioned in February 2016 with a purpose of clarifying the future purpose and role of the Link Centre. The service review concluded in May 2016 and highlighted a range of options for the future viability of the Link Centre. The full report and its supporting appendices can be accessed at Appendix 1 & Appendix 2.

In reviewing the role of the Centre, to support the boroughs prevention agenda, it found that the Centre is aligned to the overall prevention ethos as it supports a range of vulnerable groups and residents with a wealth of lifestyle support from education, to training, leisure, living well equipment and emotional support services.
The review identified that people who accessed the Centre valued the role it played in enabling them to feel safe and comfortable and was seen by them as a central hub for vulnerable residents.

However, significant investment would be required in modernising the building, with recurrent investment in the workforce to ensure sufficient capacity.

As part of the wider consultation process, a full equality impact assessment (EIA) was completed which identified a range of protected characteristic groups accessing the Link Centre for support and findings from the consultation reflect that a number of people find the Centre to be a lifeline of support.

In light of this, the options presented take into account the need to minimise any negative impact on these protected groups whilst enabling achievement of the savings identified during 2017/2018. The options outlined include:

- Lease the building to a service provider, either part or whole at a commercial rent, with a focus on the provider delivering services to vulnerable adults
- Transfer the asset to an independent organisation who will continue to provide a range of support to vulnerable adults
- Lease the asset to a service provider at nil rent (on a taper basis), aligned to a service delivery contract which provides services similar to the current Link Centre Service offer
- Generate additional income to offset the budget target, thus retaining the Link Centre Service
- Close off part of the building and offer a limited Link Centre Service
- Decommissioning of the services provided at the Link Centre (this excludes services provided by partners) and transfer of the asset back to corporate landlord

The preferred option would be to tender out the service and use of the building, on a non-rental taper basis (option 3) as this will:

- Continue to provide elements of the Link Centre Service and ensure we meet our responsibilities to support and mitigate negative impacts on protected characteristic groups;
- Provide the widest breadth of continued Link Centre support to vulnerable adults,
- Mitigate the potential number of redundancies, in particular for caretaking staff;
- Explore and test the viability of new ways of delivering services which are customer focused and build further on our vision to provide co-operative services;
- Develop a sustainable a business model for the service provider in the short to medium term;

**Recommendations**

For Cabinet to determine its preferred option and delegate authority for the following functions:

- For the Director of Adult Social Care to lead on the implementation of any new service offer for vulnerable adults at the Link Centre to include any tender of services and the award of a contract to the successful bidder;
- For the Director of Adult Social Care to lead on the implications for the workforce, if any, in liaison with human resources;
- For the Director of Economy and Skills to progress the estate requirements as part of the Corporate Portfolio, in liaison with the Leader of the Council, as Portfolio Holder for Corporate Property.
- For the Director of Legal Services to enter into and seal any documents or associated agreements including any leases.
Options to redesign the Link Centre Service

1  Background

1.1  As part of the Council’s budget planning process officers were asked to explore an option to decommission the Link Centre Service to enable adult social care to achieve £250,000 of savings during the 2017/2018 financial year.

1.2  A period of public and partner consultation commenced on 6 September 2016 and lasted for 12 weeks, through to the 29 November 2016 (the findings of the consultation are documented in section 5 for Members consideration.)

1.3  The consultation sought views and ideas on how the council could achieve the proposed level of savings, and those ideas which were viable to pursue, along with options identified by the council, and are presented in the section 3.

1.4  As a result of the consultation activity 2 petitions entitled ‘Petition against the Link Centre Closure’ have been submitted to the council containing in total between them 1,859 signatures. Both of these petitions have been addressed via the council’s Petitions Protocol.

1.5  This report outlines the current position, in relation to the role of the Centre in our borough, as well as presenting options for future usage of the building.

1.6  It should be noted that the main focus of this report is from a service delivery perspective and is driven by the requirement to mitigate any potential negative impact on affected protected characteristic groups. A full equality impact assessment is available at Appendix 3.

2  Current Position

2.1  The Link Centre was opened in 2000, and renamed as Phillip Harrison House in 2014. At the time the focus of the services provided was in relation to people with a physical disability, and as such many activities were carried out on the ground floor. The building has been developed to be very accessible. Since then the scope of service provision has changed to include a wider range of vulnerable groups and services including:

- Translation and interpretation, both for the council and external agencies
- Accessible community facilities for health and social care services
- Volunteering for all project
- Sensory room
- Bathing facilities
- Assessment rooms for moving and handling and occupational therapy
- Drop-in events, such as for carers
- Information, advice and signposting
- Aids to enable people to live independently, via the Age UK shop
- Support to health and social care groups

2.2  Whilst the Link Centre has been operating for some time it is perceived as having been in decline for the past couple of years. Footfall is down, the Centre is underused, and people report a lack of atmosphere and focus.

2.3  Whilst there may have previously been a defined purpose for the Centre, this is no longer clear, especially in relation to the council’s wider prevention and place based agendas. However, it should be noted that feedback from the consultation was that the Centre
location makes it an ideal place for vulnerable adults to access support due to it being easily accessible via public transport.

2.4 As a result, a service review was commissioned in February 2016 with a purpose of:
- Clarifying whether the Link Centre had a continuing role to play in helping to deliver the prevention offer for Oldham residents who have (or may have) care and support needs
- Clarifying how the Link Centre may (or may not) fit with the developing “place-based cluster” approach to building community resilience across Oldham borough-wide
- Clarify the role of the Link Centre Manager in supporting the development of the prevention strategy and model to ensure adult social care outcomes are effectively delivered for Oldham residents
- Clarify options for the future use of the Link Centre building to ensure best value
- Clarify what Oldham residents want and where they want it

2.5 The service review concluded in May 2016 and highlighted a range of options for the future viability of the Link Centre. The full report and its supporting appendices can be accessed at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

**Review Findings**

2.6 The review considered a wide range of areas including; the purpose of the building; the workforce; the views of people who access the Centre; as well as areas relating to the functionality of the space available, compliance with health and safety requirements and identifying a defined purpose.

2.7 The review identified that the Centre did not have a defined purpose, and based on the findings it summarised that the purpose of the Centre should focus on a ‘well lifestyle’ approach for vulnerable residents in the borough.

2.8 In reviewing the role of the Centre, to support the boroughs prevention agenda, it found that the Centre is aligned to the overall prevention ethos as it supports a range of vulnerable groups and residents with a wealth of lifestyle support from education, to training, leisure, living well equipment and emotional support services.

2.9 The review identified that people who accessed the Centre valued the role it played in enabling them to feel safe and comfortable and was seen by them as a central hub for vulnerable residents.

2.10 In addition, the review outlined the role of the Centre in supporting the Adult Social Care business plan for 2016/2017, specifically:
- Delivering a customer journey focused on prevention which individual residents can access for information, advice and support from groups to enable a well lifestyle approach
- Provides a personalised journey, focused on the individuals needs relating to information, advice, signposting and access to support mechanisms
- Delivering integration through further co-location of services with a range of partner organisations.

2.11 The review found on a monthly basis, an average of 2,000 residents access the Centre for a range of different purposes:
- Educational groups
- Sensory services
- Disability related activities, advice & information
- Health support i.e. occupational therapies
- General support relating to information, advice & signposting
• Social support and activities
• Support to manage addictions i.e. drugs and alcohol awareness sessions
• Volunteering services
• Carers support services
• Translation services
• LGBT networks and groups
• Emotional support through counselling sessions (group and 1-2-1)

2.12 Whilst the review identified that there was a range of provision within the Centre, it also identified that there were gaps within the current service offer:
• Support into employment
• Education and training across all age ranges (predominantly older adults)
• Support to maintain your mental wellbeing
• Support to remain active or increase physical activity
• Advice and information on healthy eating
• Housing and accommodation support

However, it is acknowledged that these ‘gaps’ are delivered elsewhere within other service provision which the council currently provides or commissions.

2.13 The overall findings of the review were that the Link Centre has a valuable and valued role to perform in preventing, reducing and delaying the need for more intensive care and support provision. To remove this support would leave a significant impact on more intensive operational provision. However, the types of support at the Centre need to be expanded to focus on whole life approach.

2.14 The review identified a range of developments required:

• **Purpose & strategy**: review and implement a proposed purpose for the Link Centre and consider the role of key partners within the delivery of the Centre including Early Help, Mental Health Services and Access Oldham.
• **Communication**: streamlining of current information provision and consider closer liaison with Access Oldham. Investment in staff to deliver a multi-lingual front door.
• **Project developments**: develop approaches to encourage more younger adults and people into the Centre, encourage more council events to be held at the Link Centre and adopt a ‘safe place’ model.
• **Organisation**: review the existing staffing model to ensure it is sustainable, consider varying the existing opening hours and ensure investment in workforce development.
• **Health & Safety**: ensuring compliance with health and safety regulations, and that staff are fully supported where lone working applies
• **Groups & Activities**: review the existing use of the Centre in light of a refined vision and purpose, developing appropriate charging policies and room schedules
• **Building**: refresh the interior and exterior of the building, maximizing space and ensuring the most appropriate locations for services

**Link Centre Workforce**

2.15 The Link Centre has a workforce budget of £264,000 and employs 11.5 FTE on a permanent contractual basis.

2.16 Staff roles at the Link Centre include:
• Link Centre Manager (1 FTE)
• Development Officer (1 FTE)
• Caretakers (3 FTE)
• Moving & Handling Assistant (1 FTE)
• Workstep Trainee (0.5 FTE)
• Language Line Worker (1 FTE)
• Domestic (1 FTE)
• Volunteer Co-ordinator (1 FTE)
• Research Assistants (2 FTE)
• 2 Business Support Officers (not employed by the Link Centre/Adult Social Care)

2.17 However, the current staffing arrangements do not provide sufficient capacity to ensure appropriate staffing levels are maintained during the Link Centre’s opening hours which is presenting levels of risk relating to lone working and health and safety requirements.

2.18 In addition to capacity to accommodate the extended opening times at the Link Centre, the limited number of staff at the Centre is impacting on the overall management, maintenance of the building and delivery of work priorities.

2.19 To continue to manage the Link Centre, investment would be required to increase the current FTE to ensure adherence with regulations, support and reduce lone working and ensure sufficient capacity is maintained during key holiday periods and other absences.

2.20 A modeling exercise, of the required optimal staffing levels, was completed as part of the review, and to ensure sufficient cover and capacity, the review estimated that an additional 5 FTE would be required to maintain the Link Centre. The following table identifies the roles and responsibilities required:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job title</th>
<th>Job role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Link Centre Manager</td>
<td>• Strategic direction for Link Centre&lt;br&gt;• Manage up through Senior levels&lt;br&gt;• Manage Asst. Manager and other staff&lt;br&gt;• Budget management&lt;br&gt;• Based on site&lt;br&gt;• Day to day management of Assistant Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Manager / Supervisor - Customers</td>
<td>• Deputising for LCM&lt;br&gt;• Covers whole day&lt;br&gt;• Day to day management of customer facing service, facilities, and volunteer officer&lt;br&gt;• Manage and develop Link Centre Champions&lt;br&gt;• Delegated responsibility for spending&lt;br&gt;• Lifelong learning, work and volunteering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Manager / Supervisor - Services</td>
<td>• Promotion &amp; Marketing&lt;br&gt;• Project work - Developing and launching new services and initiatives&lt;br&gt;• Event management (Open Days etc.)&lt;br&gt;• Manage and develop apprentices&lt;br&gt;• Investigate funding opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Service Officer x 2</td>
<td>• Assist and support customers&lt;br&gt;• Manage reception&lt;br&gt;• Support Facilities on some aspects during normal working hours&lt;br&gt;• Transport issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job title</td>
<td>Job role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Volunteer Coordinator | • Manage and develop volunteers  
                   | • Promote volunteering  
                   | • Maintain profiles for volunteers  
                   | • Produce and monitor devt. plans for Volunteers |
| Business Support Officer | • Admin  
                   | • Book-keeping / Purchasing / invoicing  
                   | • Notice boards  
                   | • Room bookings  
                   | • Newsletters  
                   | • Group liaison and support |
| Facilities x 3     | • All day cover  
                   | • Maintenance  
                   | • Rooms and refreshments  
                   | • Health & Safety  
                   | • Cleaning (may need additional person?) |
| Apprentice x2      | • Rotate and cover all work areas for development  
                   | • Attend training as required  
                   | • Project work  
                   | • Events management support (open days etc.) |
| Language Shop      | • Used by Adult and Children’s services, and schools.  
                   | • This is a charged for service.  
                   | • Could also be the focal point for accessible communication |

**Opening Hours**

2.21 The Link Centre is currently open every day, Monday to Friday from 7:30am to 9pm, with early closure on a Friday at 5:30pm.

2.22 Due to a skeletal workforce there are periods of lone working, at either side of the working day, when only 1 member of staff is responsible for the whole building.

2.23 At the same time, the number of groups accessing the building outside of ‘peak’ times has decreased over the last few years, with the Centre remaining open during the evening for as few as 2 people at a time, where there are 1-2-1 counselling sessions taking place.

2.24 With the skeleton workforce already in situ, the current opening hours are no longer sustainable and pose potential risks to the council, should there be an emergency during these ‘out of hours’ periods.

**Health and Safety**

2.25 In addition to the concerns outlined above in relation to lone working, significant investment is required in the Centre to ensure it conforms to health and safety standards.

2.26 The lifts within the Link Centre, including the evacuation lifts for use in emergency situations, are requiring increased investment. Response times to fix the lifts, from contractors, are impacting on the ability to operate a service with the last period of lift failure taking 2 weeks to be repaired.
In addition to the ongoing maintenance requirements for lifts, routine maintenance is becoming a significant burden due to limited staff resources.

Following a recent health and safety review, named Marshalls and health and safety leads for the building have been identified. However, currently the Link Centre does not have a named ‘building custodian’. This is in part due to the unusual nature of the Centre employing its own caretakers, rather than via the Council’s central Corporate Landlord service.

Building Assets

The Link Centre is a council freehold interest that is located along Union Street in the Centre of Oldham. The Link Centre is a four storey building, with car parking facilities.

A recent indicative open market valuation of the property has been received.

Whilst structurally the building is sound, decoration and modernization of the building is required, which could require significant investment.

The review of the Link Centre undertaken by Business Intelligence, identified that additional investment within the Centre would lead to an increased income yield. This would, in the main, be generated from maximising underused space and altering the layout across the 3 floors of accommodation. However no detailed feasibility has been undertaken in this regard.

The first floor accommodation provides a range of conference and meeting rooms, with more social areas, such as computer services and a café being located on the ground floor. The second floor is primarily office accommodation for council and other partner staff.

When the Council introduced its Corporate Landlord operating model, responsibility for all land and property within the Council’s portfolio transferred to the Corporate Property function, with the exception of parks and the Link Centre. The latter was regarded at that time as being a quite distinct ‘offer’ which justified its’ own management structure.

Services and staff located at the Link Centre

The Link Centre accommodates a range of services and organisations within the building. Predominantly these staff are located on the 2nd floor, however, some services, such as the Age UK showroom is based on the ground floor and assessment rooms for occupational therapy are located on the first and lower ground floors.

The current services located within the building are depicted within the following table, alongside whether any income is generated from hosting their organisation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Staff</th>
<th>Rental Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age UK</td>
<td>Ground &amp; Second Floor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alzheimers Society</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MioCare</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennine Care (COT)</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henshaws</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennine Care (Memory Team)</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consideration of any proposal for the Link Centre needs to consider existing SLA’s, in particular the SLA between the Council and Pennine Care for COT provisions which cites the council’s responsibilities to provide ADL assessment rooms, as well as suitable office and clinic accommodation. Removal of this support may lead to additional costs for the council in relation to the SLA (where funding is currently split 70/30 between the CCG and OMBC.)

It should be noted that apart from the SLA in place with Pennine Care, other providers do not have formal lease arrangements in place and this would need to be rectified in the short term whilst the preferred option is implemented.

2.37 As well as external organisations, the following staff teams from the Council are also located within the Link Centre accommodation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Staff</th>
<th>Rental Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra Care Housing</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory Team</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link Centre</td>
<td>Ground &amp; Second Floor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving &amp; Handling (Joint Funded)</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers Strategy</td>
<td>Second Floor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.38 The Link Centre provides a range of services from the building which included:
- IPO appointments
- Blue Badge assessments
- Carers assessments
- Welfare Rights
- Deaf and Visual Impairment Duty Service
- Moving and Handling Training
- Community Occupational Therapy
- Community Equipment Assessments
- Pennine Care CMHT
- Alcohol & Drug Service (Acorn/One Recovery)
- Equipment demonstrations
- Sensory Services
- Bathing facilities
- Services for local groups, charities and voluntary sector organisations, such as access to meeting rooms.

**Income and Budgets**

2.39 The total net budget for the Link Centre is £562,000, comprising controllable and non-controllable expenditure of £724,000 net down by income from a variety of sources totaling £162,000.

2.40 In 2016/2017, the Link Centre received a one-off grant from the CCG to fund an extension for the Volunteering Project hosted by the Link Centre totaling £15,450 which was established on a temporary basis.

2.41 Following a reduction in funding during 2013, a public health grant was awarded of £57,810. However, this grant will be reducing during the 2016/2017 year by 12.5% (£7,226), presenting an additional area of saving, or an additional income generation
requirement for the Link Centre. It is anticipated that this grant will fully cease in 2017/2018, presenting an additional pressure on the budget.

2.42 The Link Centre is required to deliver a number of income targets, relating to blue badges (£30,000), charges from letting rooms (£20,470) and translation/interpreter services (£45,000); the total income target annually is £95,470. It should be noted, that during 2015/2016, this target was not fully delivered (£5,000 under) and was only offset by vacant posts (due to recruitment delays) during the last financial year.

2.43 The operational delivery and associated costs for the Link Centre is in the region of £61,000 per annum (excluding workforce costs.)

2.44 It should be noted that currently most partner organisations at the Link Centre do not contribute to these ‘overheads’, yet access these facilities, such as printing, telephone costs and hygiene service. In some cases, spend is more than double the profiled budget. This has only been managed within the overall budget, due to vacant posts in year.

2.45 If we factor in the risk of non-delivery of the income targets, the reduction in public health grant funding and the actual costs relating to vacant posts (if recruited to) this will present a real pressure in future years for the Link Centre to operate within the constraints of the available budget.

2.46 Within the overall budget for the Link Centre, £346,070 is non-controllable expenditure. These costs relate to internal recharge for support services (£79,190), employer and public liability insurance (£5,470), capital depreciation (£185,500) and the corporate landlord recharge (£75,910).

2.47 Whilst non-controllable expenditure should be considered within future proposals, they cannot be utilised within the service to fund additional expenditure and this must be considered within the development of the future proposals for the Link Centre.

3 Options/Alternatives

3.1 A number of options have been identified via the consultation process with stakeholders which included partners, providers, members of the public and people who currently utilise the Centre and its services.

The options detailed in the subsequent sections provide a high level summary of the proposals. A detailed overview of the implications on the workforce, people who access the Centre, partners and the financial implications are attached at Appendix 5.

Option 1: Lease the building to a provider, either part or whole at a commercial rent

3.2 Leasing the building, either in part or on whole, would potentially yield a commercial income to the council of up to £100,000 per year, depending on the nature of the lease arrangements and area involved.

3.3 However, this would place additional burdens on the council in relation to relocation of existing staff and partner agencies, as well as consideration for how the existing Link Centre Services would be accommodated elsewhere to ensure that we meet our equalities duties.

3.4 Albeit, that in terms of relocation of existing staff and partner agencies, alternative accommodation could be identified within the Council’s corporate estate. In terms of alternative locations for service provision, this could similarly be explored within the
existing estate, however it would be likely to be fragmented across localities rather than centralised, which is unlikely to be acceptable from a service delivery perspective.

3.5 Should the building be vacated by adult social care, it would become a Corporate Landlord responsibility, and any rental income generated would consequently be used to support the Council’s corporate mainstream revenue budgets.

**Option 2: Asset transfer to an independent organisation**

3.6 During the consultation period suggestions were made by consultees to develop a Centre for Independent Living (CIL), on a similar basis to the Glasgow City model.

3.7 The Glasgow CIL is a user-led organisation which is focused on delivering services for vulnerable adults, which supports the city’s vision that by 2026 Glasgow will have evolved into a fully inclusive and accessible city where disabled people are able to achieve independent living. To support delivery of this vision, the CIL provides:
- Information, advice and signposting
- An Independent Living Service, which is a support service for people in receipt of direct payments and personalisation, similar to brokerage
- Payroll services
- Equality training services
- Payroll provision for people who employ a PA
- Housing advice, including advocacy provision for disabled people
- Employment support aimed at enhancing disabled peoples skills, qualifications and confidence
- Fully accessible conference facilities

3.8 The CIL model was explored and information on the funding arrangements was shared by Glasgow City Council (CC). Glasgow CC is currently reviewing its arrangements with the CIL and it was noted that investment by Glasgow CC into this model was higher than our current operational costs of delivering the Link Centre.

3.9 In addition to funding, there would need to be interest from an existing user-led group or coalition of groups, to establish themselves as an independent trust and commit to the operational running and maintenance of the building. Discussions during the consultation with some existing groups reflected that they do not have the capacity, resources or appetite to commit to an asset transfer on this scale.

**Option 3: Lease to a service provider on a nil rent basis initially, aligned to a service delivery contract**

3.10 The council was approached during the consultation period to consider an alternative model of delivery which would see elements of the Link Centre Service provided by another provider, at no cost to the council, in return for a non-rental income lease.

3.11 This would mean that the council would seek to procure a provider, who would deliver key aspects of the current service, under a lease agreement for the Centre, who would not be required to pay commercial rental costs. However, they would be expected to deliver a level of service provision as outlined in the specification throughout the lease period.

To ensure value for money, it is proposed that an initial rent free period would be agreed, with a taper applied over the period of the agreement. This will provide the opportunity for the council to potentially generate additional income during the term. The rental income will form a key aspect of the specification.

3.12 The provider would deliver the following services in lieu of payment:
- Services the provider offers would be available at a cost and managed fully by the new provider
- Access to meeting rooms and facilities, with respective room rates being charged to access the facilities
- Provide café facilities and access to refreshments for visitors to the Centre
- Information, advice and signposting, across a range of health and social care issues
- A continued presence and accommodation as per the current arrangement for occupational therapists, moving & handling, memory team and MioCare (thus reducing any impact on deliverability of these services which require co-location and accessible premises.) However, consideration will be given over the next 12 months to how these services would need to align with the integration of health and social care services.
- Operational and maintenance management, to a defined council level, during the lifetime of the lease arrangements

As part of the specification, clear costs would be outlined which would be associated with the provision of services, including workforce and maintenance costs, to ensure the model offered value for money for the council and that the provider is clear on the requirements for the expected service model.

3.13 Adopting this approach will enable the council to mitigate any potential adverse or negative impact on people from protected characteristics, and ensure that we adhere to our equality and diversity requirements.

3.14 Operational running costs for the Centre are in the region of £73,000 per annum and these would be the responsibility of the successful provider.

3.15 The successful provider would have the opportunity to minimise costs through the implementation of a charging policy. It should be noted that this is not different to the current approach by the council as there are existing income targets (circa £21k) set against these elements of income. However, this would see the Centre being run on an independent basis to develop a sustainable business model in the longer term.

3.16 It is proposed that existing partners services would remain on the second floor of the Centre and this arrangement would form a key aspect of the service specification of the successful provider. This would enable a range of services aimed at vulnerable adults to continue to be offered from a single location.

3.17 Whilst this approach will minimise some aspects of redundancy risks, it should be noted that 3 aspects of the existing Link Centre Service, will not form part of the proposed transfer of services; group development and capacity building, Volunteering for All and Translation and Interpretation services.

3.18 It is proposed to transfer the volunteers and clients associated with the Volunteering for All project, to an alternative provider. However, there would be ongoing costs associated with this approach and as part of the review it has been quoted that annual costs to the council would be in the region of £30,000. To ensure appropriate support for vulnerable adults who are both volunteering and who receive volunteer support to meet their support needs, it is proposed to continue the volunteering scheme for a further 12 months to enable appropriate transitional arrangements to be adopted, thus minimising any negative impact.

3.19 For Translation and Interpretation Services, whilst it generates an annual income (circa £8k) this is not sufficient to enable the service to become cost neutral. A new business model was developed with a focus on developing an independent register of interpreters and translators and was dependent on the provision of the service becoming cost neutral. Following a detailed review of this model it is not felt sustainable in the short term and
would require investment in the first 2 years. As a result it is proposed to disestablish this role.

3.20 This approach will also seek to minimise the number of staff at risk of redundancy, as the proposal would be that TUPE would apply to the existing 2FTE care takers.

3.21 The proposal to tender for a provider and develop a more business focused model are key themes identified from the consultation phase, where a clear message was that people understood the Centre needed to become sustainable and that we should seek to raise funds through income generation. However, to manage this internally within the council would mean additional funds for the workforce, as outlined in section 2 in relation to the current workforce position.

3.22 However, due to the lead in times for procuring a new provider and development of robust contractual arrangements, for both the delivery of the service and lease arrangements, the savings identified against the Link Centre would not be deliverable for 1 April 2017, and would be likely to be delivered towards the end of the 2017/2018 financial year. Section 6 identifies the financial impact of this approach.

**Option 4: Generate additional income to offset the budget target**

3.23 The proposal to generate additional income at the Link Centre was proposed through the consultation process.

3.24 Consideration has been given to this option, which has partially led to the development of option 3, but this is not a viable solution if this was managed by the council itself, due to the issues highlighted through sections 3.24 to 3.26.

3.25 The Link Centre already has income targets to deliver, and as outlined in section 2, during the previous financial year these were only partially achieved due to the vacant posts within the budget.

3.26 To enable the savings target to be delivered, this would require an additional £250,000 to be achieved on top of the existing £95,000 income target.

3.27 Where the existing target is not being achieved, increasing this target an additional 263% would not be realistic and would also require additional workforce investment to administer and manage the process of collecting income. This additional resource would likely cost £30,000 per year (including on-costs) which would increase the required income levels to an additional £280,000.

**Option 5: Close off part of the building and offer a limited Link Centre Service**

3.28 Consideration has also been given to options for closing off part of the Link Centre building to accommodate a reduced service offer and to seek to lease out the remaining floors.

3.29 However, apart from the second floor which is predominantly staff or partner agencies, vulnerable adults and groups who access the Centre would have limited access to existing services.

3.30 To take this approach, the most appropriate solution would be to close off the ground floor and offer this as meeting space for groups. Whilst this would meet the needs of groups, following a period of investment in the existing open plan layout, to create smaller meeting areas and rooms, it means that services located in specific areas, such as sensory, assessment rooms and bathing, would no longer be accessible, which is a key aspect of the Link Centre offer.
3.31 Initial investment would also be required if this option was pursued to enable the building to be separated and utilised for different services or rented to other agencies. This could potentially require investment in the region of £300,000 in the short term.

Option 6: Decommissioning of the Link Centre and transfer of the asset back to corporate landlord

3.32 This approach would include transfer of management responsibility to Corporate Landlord, the Council and Unity; in addition to other service areas employing Caretaking and Cleaning staff. Therefore there is potential that the costs associated with facilities management of the building could be reduced but this would only apply if the Link Centre Service was fully decommissioned.

3.33 A charging mechanism could be introduced, which would regularise occupations and seek to ensure that the operating costs were covered.

3.34 Part of the building could be let commercially, and part to a service provider, on an explicit arrangement regarding services to be provided.

3.35 It should be noted that further feasibility work is required regarding this option, in particular around how it would address our equalities duties.

3.36 Findings from the consultation reflect that vulnerable adults and groups are in strong objection with any proposal which would lead to the closure of the Link Centre Service.

3.37 Consideration would also be required about how this approach would mitigate any adverse impacts on protected characteristic groups identified as part of the equality impact assessment (see Appendix 3.)

3.38 To enable transition of vulnerable adults and groups to other alternative community facilities or services which may meet their required support needs, would require ongoing support and resourcing during 2017/2018.

4 Preferred Option

4.1 The preferred option is to tender out the service and use of the building (option 3) as this will:
   - Continue to provide elements of the Link Centre Service and ensure we meet our responsibilities to support and mitigate negative impacts on protected characteristic groups;
   - Provide the widest breadth of continued Link Centre support to vulnerable adults,
   - Mitigate the potential number of redundancies, in particular for care taking staff;
   - Explore and test the viability of new ways of delivering services which are customer focused and build further on our vision to provide co-operative services;
   - Develop a sustainable a business model for the service provider in the short to medium term;

5 Consultation

5.1 A 12 week consultation period took place with the public and people who directly use the Link Centre Services, between 6 September and 29 November 2016.

5.2 As part of the consultation, people were able to contribute to the consultation through a variety of methods:
   - Complete a questionnaire; either paper based or online, with support where this was required
• Attend one of the consultation events which took place in October and November
• Request briefings for groups, these took place at the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board and Carers for Positive Change

5.3 A total of 249 questionnaires were completed and 121 people attended the drop-in events at the Link Centre.

5.4 159 email and letter enquiries were received during the consultation period and were accounted for in the free text response sections which have been themed to identify the key issues which respondents felt we should consider as part of these proposals.

5.5 A petition entitled ‘Petition against the Link Centre Closure – Oldham Disability Arts’ led by Myra Wyers has also been previously submitted with 1733 signatures (at last count to date). A meeting was scheduled with the Petition Lead on 30 November, however, apologies were received. Formal receipt of this petition will be facilitated at the Petition Lead’s earliest convenience and will be addressed via the council’s Petitions Protocol.

5.6 As response to the proposal a group called “Link Centre Action Group” formed. This group held a demonstration outside of the Link Centre on 26 October 2016 at 1 pm. The Oldham Chronicle attended for the demonstration which involved about 20 people.

5.6 A petition entitled ‘Petition against the Link Centre Closure – Link Centre Action Group’ led by Rowland Urey as representative has also been submitted with 28 signatures. 126 of the free-text responses were also received within this submission. A meeting was held with the Petition Lead on 30 November to acknowledge receipt of the petition, to provide clarity on the next steps of the processes for decision making and feedback from consultation. Any questions were also answered if possible. Notes of this meeting were distributed to the Link Centre Action Group leads.

5.7 Whilst the questionnaires provided a range of quantitative data, the process captured ideas and suggestions on the savings proposals by people who utilise the Centre both as part of the questionnaire responses but also at the drop-in events. The key themes from these events were:
• Generate more income through hiring out rooms / renting out space / re-opening the café / new ways of working
• The council should consider the impact on other services should this support be removed, as it would be more costly and intensive
• That people were happy to contribute to the cost of facilities
• The building should remain open to ensure that people feel safe and aren’t isolated
• The services at the Link Centre are a lifeline for a number of residents
• Ensure other options are available if the Link Centre is to close, such as community facilities
• Invest time in getting it right, rather than closing it, ensuring effective promotion and investment
• This is the key accessible building, especially for disabled people, which will lead to an impact on accessibility of core support services
• The Centre acts as a hub for vulnerable residents
• Reassurance across all vulnerable communities about ongoing support and clear communication with them is required to mitigate any impact
• The Centre is centrally located which makes it significantly more accessible, especially for people with a disability
• Deliver savings in other areas of the council
• Ensure any ‘lost’ facilities are replicated elsewhere by the council or partners

5.8 The full summary report of the consultation findings can be accessed at Appendix 4 and the full questionnaire analysis at Appendix 4a.
To ensure that vulnerable adults and groups were kept fully informed, feedback sessions were held on 12 and 14 December 2016, at the Link Centre, 4pm – 6pm. The sessions focused on feeding back the findings from the consultation, the options which had been developed from this feedback and the timescales for the decision to be taken, in relation to the preferred option. The presentation is attached at Appendix 6.

6

Financial Implications

6.1
The financial Impact of each of the options that have been considered are summarised within Appendix 5.

6.2
The preferred option (option 3) is to lease the premises to a service provider on an initial nil rent basis, with the incumbent tenant contractually obliged to deliver key aspects of the current service. There is inevitably a lead in time for the negotiation and implementation of this option. It is anticipated that the full implementation of the proposal will not be until towards the end of 2017/18 financial year. This obviously has an impact on the proposed current savings of £0.250m for 2017/18.

6.3
A prudent assumption is therefore that the Authority should not plan to achieve the £250k saving in 2017/18; this will therefore increase the gap between savings required and those available for 2017/18. Should all other budget reduction proposals that are currently available be agreed, this would increase the budget reduction gap still to be addressed to a total of £8,087k. However, it would produce a financial saving of £223,000 in 2018/19 and likewise this can be incorporated as a recommendation for 2018/19 within the next iteration of the budget report.

6.4
There are additional one off costs relating to:

- Redundancies - (estimated at £28,200) for which a separately identified corporate resource exists. This cost will therefore not be borne by the service.
- Vacating, 'making good' and adapting the building - (estimated at £75,000). The possibility of the capitalization of this cost, depending on the nature of expenditure will be explored as will incorporation within the maintenance budget of the Corporate Landlord function. The budgetary implications cannot be fully assessed until the exact nature of the building work as been determined. (Andy Cooper, Finance Manager)

7

Legal Services Comments

7.1
In considering the various proposals Members need to have considered and have regard to the feedback provided in response to the consultation outlined in the report and, in addition, Members have to have "due regard" to the information contained in the equality impact assessment when considering their decision.

7.2
Members must demonstrate that they have given "due regard" to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote good relations between different groups.

7.3
Demonstrating that "due regard" has been given involves:

- assessing the potential equality impacts of proposed decisions at an appropriate stage in the decision making process - so that it informs the development of policy and is considered before a decision is taken;
- ensuring that decision makers are aware of the equality duties and any potential equality issues when making decisions.

NB – having due regard does not mean Members cannot make decisions which have the potential to impact disproportionately, it means that Members must be clear where this is
the case, and must be able to demonstrate that the Council has consulted, understood and mitigated the impact.

7.4 To ensure that the process of impact assessment is robust, it needs to:
- Be specific to each individual proposal;
- Be clear about the purpose of the proposal;
- Consider available evidence;
- Include consultation and involvement with those affected by the decision, where appropriate;
- Consider proposals for mitigating any negative impact on particular groups;
- Set out arrangements for monitoring the actual impact of the proposal.

7.5 The Equality Act 2010 extends the public sector equality duties to cover nine protected characteristics, namely:
- age,
- disability,
- gender,
- gender reassignment,
- marriage and civil partnership,
- pregnancy and maternity,
- race,
- religion and belief and
- sexual orientation

7.6 Subject to the appropriate option being determined Legal will work with HR, property and procurement colleagues to ensure appropriate processes that flow from the decision will be followed. Legal Services have advised in relation to the current occupiers of the Centre and their legal rights, and notice requirements in relation to such arrangements. (Colin Brittain, Assistant Borough Solicitor)

8. Co-operative Agenda

8.1 Seeking to tender out the service will enable delivery of mutual benefits for the council, people who access the service and its partners, delivering a revised approach to supporting vulnerable adults which is fair, transparent and open. It recognises and respects the need for ongoing support to vulnerable adults whilst reflecting the challenge to adopt new ways of working which enable services to become self-sustaining.

9 People Services Comments

9.1 To proceed with the preferred option 3, further work would need to be undertaken to establish the full staffing implications. Discussions continue to be underway about alternative provision for some services and the outcome of these discussions will determine whether TUPE applies for a number of staff.

In addition, option 3 identifies some service areas that are proposed to be disestablished i.e. the Council would not continue to deliver them or seek an alternative provider to deliver on its behalf. If this option is agreed then the cost of potential redundancies would need to be factored. We will however seek to minimize these and the impact on staff by exploring alternative employment opportunities through redeployment for those staff that are likely to be displaced. (Emma Gilmartin, HR Business Partner)

10 Risk Assessments
10.1 The Council needs to mitigate some risks from the present operation of the Link Centre. The option presented sets out how this can be done in line with budget targets and the continued utilisation of the building (Mark Stenson, Head of Corporate Governance).

11 IT Implications
11.1 None.

12 Property Implications
12.1 The Link Centre was excluded from the management responsibility of the Corporate Property function following implementation of the Council’s Corporate Landlord operating model.

12.2 Consequently, whilst it is understood that there are a significant number of organizations in occupation at the property, a number are doing so without the benefit of any formal agreement. As a result there is a degree of uncertainty and risk surrounding the Council’s ability to secure vacant possession of the building in a timely manner. It is imperative therefore that all occupations are formalized as soon as possible in order to facilitate progressing any of the options identified within the report.

12.3 It is appreciated that the Service wishes to retain at least an element of on-going service delivery from the building, whilst realizing the required Star Chamber efficiency, and is exploring options to ensure that the asset is utilized to maximum effect to support this objective.

12.5 The property is regarded as a valuable corporate asset, both in financial terms and in potential to support the Council’s wider regeneration aspirations within the town centre.

12.6 The preferred option will require development of a very detailed service specification and Full Repairing and Insuring (FRI) lease terms to support the procurement process. In order to justify FRI terms, a lease length of at least 10 years would be anticipated. In addition, it is suggested that the contracts make provision for/require ‘open book accounting’ to facilitate potential ‘profit share’/overage arrangements. (Cath Conroy, Head of Asset Management and Estates)

13 Strategic Sourcing Implications
13.1 A number of options and alternatives have been described in Section 2 of this report. Strategic Sourcing will ensure any commercial solutions and outcomes required are in accordance with the required EU legislation, namely the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, the Concessions Contracts Regulations 2016 and the Council’s Contract Procedure Rules.

13.2 It is also prudent to consider whether this report provides details of the financial implications, sustainability, and adherence to Best Value duties for each option/appraisal identified. In addition, how aligned these options/appraisals are with the wider commercial strategy. (Nicola Wadley, Interim Head of Strategic Sourcing)

14 Environmental and Health & Safety Implications
14.1 None

15 Equality, community cohesion and crime implications
15.1 Full consideration of the proposals against protected characteristic groups has been considered and it is believed that the preferred option will mitigate any impact on the
protected groups which would be impacted by decommissioning the Link Centre (people on low incomes, people with a disability and carers.)

16  **Equality Impact Assessment Completed?**
16.1 Yes (see Appendix 3)

17  **Key Decision**
17.1 Yes

18  **Key Decision Reference**
18.1 SCS-10-16

19  **Background Papers**
19.1 None

20  **Appendices**
20.1 Appendix 1: Link Centre Review outcome report
20.2 Appendix 2: Link Centre Review outcome appendices
20.3 Appendix 3: Full equality impact assessment
20.4 Appendix 4: Summary report of consultation findings
    Appendix 4a: Detailed analysis of consultation questionnaires
20.5 Appendix 5: Detailed options appraisal
20.6 Appendix 6: Consultation Feedback presentation