



## CABINET – 4TH SEPTEMBER 2012

**SUBJECT: FORMER WOOLWORTH BUILDING, BARGOED**

**REPORT BY: DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To identify and allocate a building conversion budget to the former Woolworth building at Bargoed.

### **2. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

- 2.1 This proposal links to the Authority's Regeneration Strategy "People, Business, Places "
- 2.2 Optimising the use of council owned buildings accords directly with the council's Asset Management Strategy

### **3. THE REPORT**

- 3.1 The former Woolworth building at Bargoed was originally acquired with a HoV grant of £325k in March 2010 with the intention to convert to offices in order to 'kick start' the Business Quarter designated in the northern part of Bargoed Town Centre.
- 3.2 The original intention was to convert the building with EU grant, however, this never materialised and in January 2011 it was agreed to let the High Street level (the upper level) to a retailer. The middle and lower floors with 600 square metres of useable space remain vacant.
- 3.3 This is a key building in terms of its size and location and presents the best opportunity to develop an employment role for Bargoed through creation of office space adjacent to the new public transport interchange.
- 3.4 There has been a lack of private interest in such a development and this has encouraged officers to consider the role that the authority has, as the largest employer in the county borough, in utilising this potential office space by transferring existing services into the building.
- 3.5 It is estimated, although no firm plans have been developed, that some 50 staff and equipment could be accommodated within the space available and the presence of such numbers will inevitably contribute to the regeneration of the town centre and, hopefully, stimulate future interest in the Business Quarter.
- 3.6 To achieve this the middle and lower floors will need significant investment particularly in terms of IT and telecommunications.

#### **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no direct equalities implications of this report and its recommendations on groups or individuals who fall under the categories identified in Section 6 of the Council's Strategic Equality Plan.
- 4.2 If this report's proposals are accepted however, and services are transferred to the building, any conversion plans for the site would be subject to the same DDA access audits as other council buildings, thus improving access for staff, public and visitors.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There is currently £300k grant available to improve the external appearance of the building, this will include the provision of new and additional windows, and an improved entrance to the middle floor.
- 5.2 Although plans for the internal development are not as yet defined it is estimated that conversion costs, including IT/telecommunications, heating and lighting modifications could cost £400k - £500k. This estimate excludes any specialist equipment/infrastructure works that may be required depending on the new service tenants
- 5.3 It is proposed that Corporate Services revenue reserves be used to provide the funding referred to in paragraph 5.2.

#### **6. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The current proposal is to transfer, as yet unidentified, services into the building. Such a transfer will be linked to the wider accommodation rationalisation/modernisation being considered under the Asset Management Strategy. This will impact upon staff.

#### **7. CONSULTATIONS**

- 7.1 The results of all consultations have been incorporated into this report. Local Members endorse and fully support the recommendations.

#### **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 It is recommended that a budget of £500k be allocated for the creation of office space at the former Woolworth building Bargoed. It is anticipated that conversion works will take around 4 months and with procurement time expenditure is likely to span the financial years 2012/13 and 2013/14.

#### **9. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 To contribute to the regeneration of Bargoed Town Centre by maximising the use of vacant areas within a building that is owned by the council.

#### **10. STATUTORY POWER**

- 10.1 Local Government Act 1972 and 2000. This is a Cabinet function

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