

Monday 16 September 2024

Report of the Leader of the Council

Marmion House Reception and Committee Meetings

Exempt Information

None

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report details a proposal for reopening reception at Marmion House and the steps needed to make this area fit for purpose for our customers once again.
- 1.2 The report also proposes to relocate all Committee meetings from the Town Hall to the council chamber at Marmion House.
- 1.3 The report proposes to update audio visual technology to enhance meeting delivery and undertake minor refurbishment work to the current chamber.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that cabinet approve the following recommendations:

- 2.1 to reopen the reception area at Marmion House to provide face-to-face customer services which meet the needs of the whole community as follows: Monday, Wednesday, Friday between 10.00am and 2.00pm & Tuesday and Thursday 2.00pm - 6.00pm
- 2.2 to approve the addition to the establishment for up to two years 0.92 FTE Customer Experience Assistant, 0.6 FTE Customer Service Officer funded from reserves.
- 2.3 to redesign the reception area to support the customer service offer which will open within four months of Cabinet approval (subject to contractors).
- 2.4 to review opening hours, usage, and customer feedback on a weekly basis with a full review at six months.
- 2.5 to continue to develop the service to explore and incorporate co-location working with statutory partners, the voluntary sector and community groups.
- 2.6 to continue to deliver the full customer service offer from the Tamworth Information Centre at the Assembly Rooms during their opening hours.
- 2.7 to relocate all council meetings to Marmion House upon completion of audio-visual technology installation and minor refurbishment of the council chamber, except for the civic ceremonies.
- 2.8 to approve the repurposing of capital funds identified for Recovery and Reset and Town Hall improvement projects to fund refurbishments to the chamber and Marmion House reception.

3. Executive Summary

3.1 Re-opening face to face customer services at Marmion House

Marmion House main reception closed to the public in 2020 because of Government restrictions in response to the Covid19 pandemic. At this time customer service staff began working from home. A report to full council in March 2024 provided an overview of current customer service provision and outlined several options for future consideration of the council's customer service offer for Tamworth residents and businesses. As a result, it was agreed that officers would explore options for delivery of council customer services in a town centre location. In May 2024 with a change of political control, officers were asked to make proposals for the provision of face-to-face customer services at Marmion House.

This proposal will see the existing reception area adapted to provide a customer journey that is smooth and enables flow from initial greeting and triage to self service areas and onwards to more specific support or appointments if required. This model supports our aim to make every contact count and to manage enquiries at the first point of contact where possible. It will however be in an area where there is familiarity being an accessible and secure town centre location with staff that have appropriate knowledge.

The refurbishment involves closing off a large amount of the existing reception area, limiting open areas and allowing the council to better manage a secure space. It is proposed that the service will open four hours per day Monday to Friday with provision for later closing at 6pm two days per week. It is anticipated that this will provide a better level of provision for residents' needs. Customer demand for the new service will be monitored and reviewed weekly with other Heads of Service. A full review will be undertaken at 6 months with appropriate recommendations made to the Executive Leadership Team.

The Customer Service Team (CST) will help vulnerable customers directly and arrange face-to-face appointments with officers as appropriate, which will increase the positive public perception, enhance our reputation, and improve customer satisfaction. It should be noted that whilst this additional service offer will be provided, all other contact channels, such as webchat and telephone, will continue to be proactively managed with no change to the back-office service offer. Section 4 provides an in-depth description of the proposals.

3.2 Relocation of Committee Meetings to Marmion House

In May 2024, the newly elected Cabinet proposed relocating all council meetings to Marmion House except for ceremonial council meetings namely Mayor making in May and Christmas full council which will remain at the Town Hall, these meetings will have live streamed videography.

This move aims to better accommodate elected members, particularly in terms of accessibility, with the added convenience of onsite parking facilities. Additionally, this move is expected to enhance operational efficiency and minimise the necessity for overtime, particularly when meetings at Marmion House and the Town Hall occur concurrently.

3.2.1 Replacement of existing audio-visual provision

The audio-visual system in the council chamber has been in place for over 15 years. Due to rapid technological advancements, it is now outdated and no longer suitable for running committee meetings effectively. Modern technology to improve sound and video quality, visual displays, provide hybrid meetings and improve overall functionality will be installed ensuring that committee meetings can be conducted more efficiently and effectively. This will also provide a better customer experience and improved transparency for the democratic process.

Five service providers have expressed an interest in submitting a tender to provide the audio-visual requirements, all of whom have visited site to ensure that they can provide accurate quotations aligned to our requirements. The deadline for the tender process closed on 30 August 2024, and it is anticipated that the contract will be awarded by mid-September.

3.2.2 Refurbishment of council chamber

Minor refurbishment is required to once again make the chamber fit for purpose enhancing both the room's presentation and comfort and complying with health and safety requirements. This will provide better accessibility, enhanced user experience, and will future proof the chamber for upcoming technological advancements.

The improvements to the furniture and furnishings in the council chamber are designed to significantly enhance the user experience and including enhanced lighting, refreshed decor and furnishing which aim to create a more functional, comfortable, and visually appealing space. Section 5 elaborates on the proposals by detailing the specific upgrades and enhancements planned for the council chamber's audio-visual system and environment.

4. Face-to-Face customer services at Marmion House

4.1 Current position

Marmion House reception area, in its current form, provides some of the infrastructure required. However, the space is no longer fit for purpose, is dated, lacks a welcoming feel, and lacks the configuration to support a flexible approach to providing effective customer services. There were also several health and safety implications identified with the existing configuration, which have been considered in providing this proposal. These were around the reception layout and it not being compliant in terms of display screen equipment or providing adequate space for movement of staff. Appendix 1 provides images of the existing space and layout.

The current layout does not allow for the flexibility to operate efficiently using existing staff resource or provision already in place via the post room due to lack of connectivity between the spaces. Phone support during quieter times would not be possible either due to the acoustics. For these reasons, an alternative proposal has been explored, with the focus on ensuring that the space offers the greatest opportunity for use by the public.

Both prior to the closure and through ongoing monitoring at Tamworth Information Centre (TIC), the number of face-to-face enquiries continues to show a decline, meaning the existing layout of the current front reception at Marmion House is excessive. It does not allow for hands on interaction or any level of digital offering, which previous surveys have shown to be the customer preference.

The current face to face customer service provision at TIC is provided over 6 days between 10.00am to 4.00pm Monday to Saturday. It is proposed that this service will continue.

The existing corporate post room provision at Marmion House will continue to fulfil the same function, managing inbound mail, scanning, and indexing, supporting visitors and contractors, providing a security presence as required, opening, and locking Marmion House as well as managing meeting rooms.

4.1.1 Insight on usage of TIC (Tamworth Information Centre) for generic queries

Data continues to be gathered to provide information to support decision making. Peak usage times continue to be mornings with demand also lessening as the week progresses with an average of 44 enquiries per month. The chart below shows reason for enquiries from January to July 2024. Council Tax and Housing continue to be the primary reason for customer contact.

DefaultDeptSupport	Count of ContactType
Revenues Council Tax	86
Housing	76
All Departments	68
Benefits	37
Environmental Health	24
Street Scene	12
Legal	5
Planning	3
Total	311

4.2 Service Offer

With a shift to more digital ways of working our self-serve offer will be developed as we make further system improvements, embracing technological advancements. The aim of this is to allow us to support people to self-serve and drive digital use, whilst also having trained staff available to assist the most vulnerable.

- A total of four computer stations will be provided, with both high-and low-level access to give flexibility, particularly those with accessibility issues. From here a streamlined version of our website will be available to help customers access digital content of the most frequently requested services, appendix 2 details the website quick links which will promote easier access to most used services.
- Three clearly marked self-service phones for enquiries will be readily available, allowing customers to make calls to the customer contact centre or to specific numbers determined by demand; in each instance these will be clearly identified. These will offer the same level of contact and support as provided currently. All phones will be set up with various quick dial numbers for instance the repairs 0800 number.
- Self-service points will be designed to ensure higher levels of privacy.
- The reception area is fully accessible including street level access via automatic doors with no steps.
- The space will provide suitable and sufficient arrangements for those with impairments including, a hearing loop and access to language line for BSL support.
- Appointments with officers from operational service areas e.g., Housing, Benefits, Revenues and Planning will be made available subject to demand, on a regular basis.
- Proposal to develop the service offer further by incorporating targeted/bespoke surgeries by working with third party sectors and community groups.
- The Citizens Advice service is available in a neighbouring building and delivered as part of a broader CIC support offering and signposting will continue to be provided.
- The area will be used to display information and marketing material on screens providing further signposting to TBC (Tamworth Borough Council) services and other partners/agencies and to support opportunities for promotion of events as well as corporate and external programmes. For example, publicising registering to vote, health campaign, energy initiatives.

4.3 Cost per enquiry

Benchmarking of cost per enquiry against other councils and the industry standard has been undertaken to demonstrate how efficient the proposal is, this is based on 200 enquiries per week and current salary costs only. Where staffing costs increase due to pay awards annually the cost per enquiry will also increase unless the volume of enquiry also increases. Results from other organisations can be seen below.

Councils:

- Telford & Wrekin Council – no face-to-face services and do not monitor cost per enquiry.
- Newcastle under Lyme BC – no face-to-face services and do not monitor cost per enquiry.
- Nottingham City Council – do not monitor cost per enquiry due to complexity in monitoring.
- South Staffordshire Council – offer face to face services however do not monitor their cost per enquiry.

Industry standard:

Source	Face to face	Telephone	Post	Online
PWC	£10.53p	£3.39p	£12.10p	£0.08p
SOCITM	£14.00p	£5.00p	n/a	£0.17p

Price Waterhouse Coopers - The Economic Case for Digital Inclusion and The Society
The Society of IT Management - Going where the eyeballs are, connecting councils with their communities

Therefore, the cost per enquiry for our proposed offer at £5.06 provides value for money when compared to industry standards due to the reduced opening hours, based on assumed visits per week.

4.4 Customer journey and flow

A member of the Customer Service team will be located at the entry of the building to greet customers as they walk in, carry out an initial triage and signpost where needed to the phones or kiosks areas, offering support where required to use these.

If the enquiry cannot be dealt with via self-service an assistant will be available to help at the reception desk. Appointments will be made for customers with more in-depth enquiries to meet a Customer Service Officer in a private area. This layout is to encourage and maintain as great a level of self-service as possible before interacting with the more technical officer and to offer support to those vulnerable customers with complex needs.

The proposals have been developed considering customer requirements at the heart of the decisions. A range of insight including the 2022 and 2023 resident surveys, learning from pop up engagement sessions held last year and the use of household characteristics data at ward level.

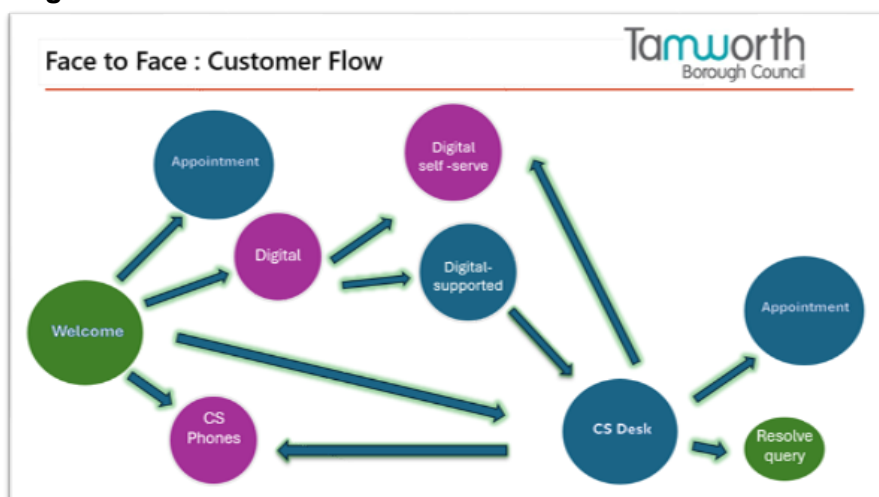
An approach similar in design to the banking model has been proposed, with the aim of providing the greatest flexibility in levels of service offered, which will work across different customer segments. We learnt from a recently commissioned mosaic report, that there is a mix of digital readiness across ward areas and the proposed model allows for several touchpoints to be introduced and support many customer needs. Once operational we will continue to gather customer data and feedback, note pain points and opportunities, and further shape the face-to-face offer as required. Feedback to other services will also be provided to further enhance the offer.

4.4.1 Proposed customer flow

The diagram below shows the proposed customer flow and outlines the different interaction points. It shows the process of guiding customers from the moment they enter until their query is resolved through their preferred method. The newly situated reception area, which is adjacent to the post room, offers the advantage of allowing post room staff to collaborate closely with reception staff.

The green elements show the start and end of the customer journey. Self-service options are denoted in purple, while assisted services are marked in blue. This plan shows that although digital methods are promoted, staff support will be accessible to help customers use these services, and they will also be ready to provide direct face-to-face assistance.

Diagram 1



4.4.2 Proposed refurbishment and layout of reception area

Appendix 3 provides a diagram showing the design for the reception area.

A quote has been obtained from our appointed contractor to undertake the required improvements and reconfiguration works outlined above to provide a welcoming and safe space. This includes cosmetic, compliance, technical infrastructure, and equipment requirements as well as the safe removal of equipment no longer required. Whilst a 4-month window has been provided this is indicative to incorporate lead and completion time for necessary works subject to the works being completed. Contractors and suppliers will be sourced using corporate procurement guidance.

4.4.3 Customer service team role

The customer service team will:

- handle a high volume of basic enquiries, such as checking rent/council tax balances, verifying documents, reporting issues, and initiating service requests.
- promote the adoption of self-service technologies.
- address more complex questions, including those about council tax arrangements, setting up direct debits, applying single person discounts, and fielding benefits-related enquiries. They will also take calls related to revenue and benefits when not assisting customers in person.
- operate on a rota basis, providing in-person services at Marmion House and the Tamworth Information Centre, as well as supporting the existing contact centre operations. The rota aims to ensure service continuity and team resilience.
- Furthermore, the introduction of a new uniform for the team will be introduced to enhance visibility and enable them to be easily identified.

4.4.4 Performance monitoring

Robust monitoring of the service provision will be undertaken using several key performance indicators (KPI's), these are:

1. Total number of visitors entering the building through the front door
2. Total amount of supported enquiries dealt with (face to face)
3. Total amount of appointments attended.
4. Total amount of interactions with self-service computers
5. Total amount of calls made with the self-service phones.
6. Percentage of customer satisfaction

5. Relocation of Committee Meetings

5.1 Current position

All council meetings are currently held in the Town Hall, facilitated by staff from Democratic Services with support from ICT and Customer Services.

The furniture is large and cumbersome with uncomfortable seating and no modesty screening. The current layout is difficult to move and only allows limited public attendance at meetings.

Council meetings are broadcast on YouTube. Currently every full council meeting is live streamed, with all other meetings having non-exempt items recorded and uploaded immediately the meeting closes.

The existing broadcasting technology, initially adopted for cost-effectiveness, no longer meets its intended purpose. It places a heavy burden on officers and offers an unsatisfactory experience for remote viewers.

In May 2024, the newly elected Cabinet proposed relocating all council meetings to Marmion House. This move aims to better accommodate elected members, particularly in terms of accessibility, with the added convenience of onsite parking facilities. Additionally, this move is expected to enhance operational efficiency and minimise the necessity for overtime, particularly when meetings at Marmion House and the Town Hall occur concurrently.

5.2 Meeting technology

It is proposed to replace the current audio-visual equipment to support the growing need for efficient and accessible council meetings with an innovative technology solution. Using new digital tools will provide opportunities for streamlined communication, enhanced collaboration, and ensure that vital information is readily available to members.

The following elements will be included in the innovative technology solution:

- Fully integrated with current systems
- Ability to run “hybrid” meetings using Microsoft teams for officer and visitor attendance.
- Fully accessible for all
- Microphone units
- Touch screen meeting controls to enable control of webcasting and the audio-visual conference system with minimum intervention from officers and the ability to control the meeting remotely.
- Auto-focus, auto tracking, high definition (HD) cameras for webcasting that cover the whole of the meeting area. The conference microphone system must automatically control the cameras to capture Members as they speak.
- Large screens to display the meeting broadcast. The amount and size of the screens must be sufficient for all meeting participants to ensure visibility and clarity of the content.
- Ability for laptop presentations, HD camera feed, Hybrid feed, voting results to be displayed.
- Loudspeakers within the chamber to enable all persons within the meeting to clearly hear all the proceedings.
- The ability to play or stream music.

5.3 Improvements to Marmion House council chamber

To ensure future successful meetings in the existing council chamber, improvements are necessary to enhance both the room’s presentation and comfort. To bring the room back into an adequate standard to host committee meetings new lighting, carpet, chairs, and curtains/blinds are required.

Several service providers have visited site to quote for the various requirements, however, quotations for all elements have not yet been received.

A capital budget of £688,800 exists which was established for improvement work to the Town Hall, it is proposed that some of this budget is repurposed to support these proposals.

6. Communications plan

A comprehensive communications plan will be developed to support both the opening of reception services and the transfer of committee meetings to Marmion House. It will be developed to contain several key components including:

- key messages to be delivered.
- timeline for delivery.
- communication channels to be used.
- Stakeholders.
- responsibility for each element of the plan.

7. Project plan

A project plan will be developed to define the scope, objectives, and deliverables of the project. It will ensure that everyone involved also understands their roles and responsibilities. It will provide a framework for monitoring progress and managing risks, enabling timely adjustments to keep the project on track.

8. Resource Implications

8.1 Customer service offer

8.1.1 Cost implications

A current capital budget is in place, namely £140,000 for recovery and reset office requirements. Total indicative costs to date are £80,000 with approximate breakdown detailed below:

Capital	
Building	£49,986
IT infrastructure	£10,000
Ancillary	£20,000
Total	£79,986

The recovery and reset capital budget will be utilised to fund this project. Staff revenue expenditure in year one is based on an indicative January 2025 implementation, staff revenue expenditure over years two to five is based on salary costs including on costs and an assumed 2% year on year pay increase.

Several options have been calculated across differing operating models, each providing opening hours and cost per enquiry based on an indicative 200 enquiries per week accounting for staff costs only the options are detailed in appendix 4.

The costs for the proposals are detailed below:

Mon to Fri - Reduced opening hrs - 4 hours per day 10.00 - 2.00 or 2.00 to 6.00pm						
	Revenue Year 1 (Jan-Mar 25)	Revenue Year 2	Revenue Year 3	Revenue Year 4	Revenue Year 5	Total
IT costs/other		£2,500	£2,550	£2,601	£2,653	£10,304
Staff ^	£13,194	£53,836	£54,912	£56,011	£57,131	£235,083
Total **	£13,194	£56,336	£57,462	£58,612	£59,784	£245,387
Cost per enquiry*	£5.06	£5.16	£5.27	£5.37	£5.48	

*Cost per enquiry based on staff costs only and assumed 200 enquiries per week

** All costs include an assumed 2% year on year increase
Staffing includes on costs

Staff costs are based on additional (0.92 FTE) Customer Experience Assistant and an additional (0.6 FTE) Customer Service Officer. In addition, the new offer will be supported by the existing Customer Service Assistants (CSA) to deliver the intended service without disruption. The additional staffing requirements will be on a temporary basis for up to two years and will initially be funded from the transformation reserve, which will be released into Customer Services budgets. It should be noted that with planned digital improvements and an increase in self-serve, a reduction in revenue expenditure from years three onwards is feasible.

8.1.2 Human Resource Implications

To ensure the new service can be delivered additional positions are required to be added to the establishment as follows:

- 0.92 FTE Customer Experience Assistant
- (0.6 FTE Customer Service Officer

The additional staffing requirements will be on a temporary basis for up to two years.

There will be a requirement to undertake, subject to approval, a recruitment process for the new positions, any changes to current staffing arrangements will be subject to discussions with Trade Union representatives and utilising established consultation protocols.

8.2 Relocation of committee meetings

8.2.1 Cost implications

There is an existing, unspent capital scheme of £87,000 in place for replacement audio/visual technology for the town hall. Indicative quotes received as part of discussions with a range of suppliers do exceed this but there may be opportunities to reduce costs with optional elements of the specification and streaming hours purchased. Approval is sought for delegated authority for the Assistant Director People, Head of Technology, and Information Services in conjunction with the Leader of the Council to implement the replacement of audio-visual technology in the council chamber at Marmion House. Should the existing budget be exceeded the current town hall improvement capital budget which currently stands at £688,800 will be utilised to support the implementation.

Currently, the exact costs for the refurbishment of Marmion House Council Chamber have not been determined. However, approval is sought for delegation for the Assistant Director Assets in conjunction with the Leader of the Council to implement the relocation and allocate a part of the existing capital budget earmarked for town hall improvement to cover these costs once they are ascertained.

8.2.2 Human resource implications

Core ICT staff will provide support to the installation.

Democratic Services staff and ICT core team will be given training, there is also an element of support by the supplier built into the tender specification.

Staff members who currently oversee security Town Hall meetings will also be assigned to manage committee meetings at Marmion House.

9. Legal and Risk implications

9.1 Customer service offer

There are several risks associated with this proposal.

- Increased in year financial risk pressure.
- If reopened – this proposal does not align with the council's strategy to close and dispose of Marmion House.
- Prior to its closure, face-to-face customer service provision at Marmion House was delivered on an appointment only basis, with officers signposting and booking appointments with technical officers, as necessary. Ongoing monitoring suggests that demand for face-to-face enquiries is low, making the cost per each enquiry handled significant.
- Whilst support will be available, the nature of some enquiries will require a customer to book an appointment and return later where specialist advice is needed.
- Potential change to officer terms and conditions which will have a budgetary impact and may increase turnover.
- New ways of working will be necessary which will take time to develop and embed.
- There is an increased likelihood that significant waste demand will occur. Close monitoring will take place to mitigate and provide alternative solutions, particularly digitally focused, where possible.

- Recruiting and training additional officers to meet the agreed service levels will require some time.
- This proposal limits the move to the ground floor which has a direct environmental impact as several floors will remain operational to accommodate office staff.

The risk assessment for the reconfigured reception area and delivery model will be updated to consider all the above risks.

9.2 Relocation of committee meetings

There are a few risks associated with the relocation of committee meetings to Marmion House

- The proposal does not align to the long-term strategy to close and dispose of Marmion House, to mitigate these future discussions regarding a permanent council office will ensure that consideration is given to effective delivery of committee meetings.
- Accessibility, it is crucial that the Chamber is fully accessible and has appropriate facilities for all. This is one of the major drivers behind the proposal to relocate as facilities at Marmion House are fully accessible.
- Operational disruption, to mitigate disruption, the move to Marmion House will not take place until all installation and refurbishment work has concluded.
- Communication challenges, to mitigate any issues all stakeholders will be informed about the changes along with new signage to inform about the change.
- Security and safety, security measures and emergency procedures will be reviewed and communicated to meeting attendees.
- Public engagement could be affected by a change of location leading to reduced participation, this will be mitigated by additional communication and signage.

The risk assessment for the council chamber and adjoining area will be updated to consider all the above risks.

10. Equalities Implications

Accessibility is a key consideration of the proposals all areas will be fully accessible. The customer service team are working with the local Action Deafness charity to ensure provision is fit for purpose. Officers can also access translation services including British Sign Language.

A community impact assessment can be found at appendix 5

11. Environment and Sustainability Implications (including climate change)

11.1 Customer service offer

Re-opening an additional front door will have an impact on our environmental performance, however, to mitigate this, the customer service team will promote sustainability informing customers about our commitments and encouraging environmentally friendly practices. This will be done by promoting a reduction in the use of postal services, reduce the need for home visits and a reduction in use of paper-based forms; instead encouraging the use of digital self-serve. The team will also identify opportunities for energy savings & waste management improvements through raised awareness.

11.2 Relocation of committee meetings

Enhanced technology and the advancement of digital solutions enable a positive influence on the ecological footprint of meetings. The proposed technology supports hybrid formats which can promote reduced travel, leading to a decrease in carbon emissions associated with travelling to the meeting.

12. Background Information

12.1 Benchmarking

Various councils have been contacted to compare their current face to face offerings with this proposal.

In comparison to other councils, the customer service offered at the Tamworth Information Centre aligns with standard practices. For instance, straightforward enquiries are addressed promptly, whereas more complex issues necessitate scheduling a follow-up appointment for specialised assistance. Additionally, like other councils, a self-service option is available.

Councils are updating their reception spaces to include additional self-service stations equipped with phones and computers. This initiative aims to encourage customers to independently address their queries, with staff available to help as needed.

The opening times of phone lines varies from council to council ranging from 9.00am to 3.30pm Monday – Friday to some with periods of closure for training and meetings.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Images of current Marmion House Reception

Appendix 2 - Website quick links

Appendix 3 - Design drawing of proposed reception layout

Appendix 4 - Costed options and cost per enquiry

Appendix 5 - Community Impact Assessment

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