

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CORPORATE SERVICES CABINET MEMBER
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SALE OF HUMBER BRIDGE TICKETS

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To determine the council's position on the sale to the public and businesses of Humber Bridge tickets from council offices
- 1.2 The key points of the report are:
 - 1.2.1 The council sells Humber Bridge tickets from Brigg and Barton Local Links, and at the cash office at Church Square House.
 - 1.2.2 During 2008/2009, 18,495 books were sold amounting to £1.5M.
 - 1.2.3 The service costs the council £18,500 a year to administer. The council receives no funding support from the Humber Bridge Board for the sale of the tickets.
 - 1.2.4 There are cash handling implications of bringing key services together.
 - 1.2.5 There is a range of outlets for the purchase of Humber Bridge tickets.
- 1.3 An urgent decision is requested on the basis that any increase to tolls is likely to take effect from July. The revised procedures need to be in place by then and one-month notice period is required for members of the public to be made aware of the new arrangements.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The council sells all classes of Humber Bridge tickets to the public and businesses for the Humber Bridge Board. It does this at Church Square House cash office, and Brigg and Barton Local Links. The six classes are:

- Class 1: motor cycles
- Class 2: Cars and motor caravans, goods vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes
- Class 3: Goods vehicles between 3.5 and 7.5 tonnes, small buses, class 2 + trailers
- Class 4: Goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes with 2 axles, large buses
- Class 5: Goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes with 3 axles
- Class 6: Goods vehicles over 7.5 tonnes with 4 axles

- 2.2 The sale of tickets cost the council around £13,500 in staff time and £5,000 in security during 2008/2009. The council receives no revenue from the Humber Bridge Board to sell tickets on its behalf; Council Tax payers in North Lincolnshire are in effect subsidising the sale of tickets for the Bridge Board.
- 2.3 The sale of tickets takes place at a time when the four Humber Unitary authorities, the Hull & Humber Chamber of Commerce, local MPs and regional bodies are actively seeking Ministerial approval to abolish or significantly reduce the toll. There is also a very real possibility that another increase in the toll will take effect shortly. The council has been informed this week that the Secretary of State for Transport has now received the Inspector's report and recommendations from the March 2009 Public Inquiry. A decision on whether to grant the Humber Bridge Board its request to increase the toll, with immediate effect, is expected at any time. The evidence from previous public inquiries suggests an increase will be approved.
- 2.4 Humber Bridge toll tickets are available direct from the Humber Bridge Board offices, and its web site and from five other locations in the Humber sub region. Cleethorpes TIC is one of these sites and charges 50p for each transaction.
- 2.5 The council's Church Square House cash office is classed as its corporate cash office. It was always intended Local Link offices would only take receipt of smaller amounts of money in handling a wider enquiry e.g. Bulky Item collection. Staffing and security levels are set accordingly.
- 2.6 Continuing to sell Bridge tickets at Brigg and Barton Local Links has compromised that strategy. This needs to be resolved.
- 2.7 The aim is for Brigg and Barton Local Links to be developed into "hub" outlets, bringing key council services together in the near future. This is in line with the council's Customer Service Strategy.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Option A: Sell all six classes of ticket from Church Square House only.
- 3.2 Option B: Withdraw the sale of all six classes of Humber Bridge tickets from all council sites, while recognising the Humber Bridge Board sells tickets from its own offices at Hessle and via its web site.

- 3.3 Option C: Do nothing, ie, continue to sell all classes of tickets at all its sites regardless of the implications for staffing levels and the Customer Service Strategy.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 Option A: Retains a service within the council for North Lincolnshire residents and businesses. It also achieves efficiencies at Brigg and Barton Local Links. It enables the future relocation of offices to take place. And the creation of a “hub” type presence in both Brigg and Barton in the near future, bringing key council services together.
- 4.2 Option B: This option achieves maximum efficiencies within the council.
- 4.3 Option C: Cost implications of relocating offices with the current volume of cash handling would mean anticipated service improvements in Brigg and Barton will be adversely affected. It will not enable key council services to be brought together for the foreseeable future in these two towns.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

- 5.1 Option A: Significantly reduces the amount of cash taken at Brigg and Barton Local Link offices enabling efficiencies to be achieved. A saving of £5k is achieved relating to reduced cash collections from Brigg and Barton. A further saving of £12,000 in staff time can also be made at Brigg and Barton.

It enables future relocation of offices for both Brigg and Barton by bringing key services together under one roof in both towns, in line with the council’s Customer Service Strategy.

- 5.2 Option B: Would release maximum efficiencies for the council.
- 5.3 Option C: None.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

- 6.1 Option A: Is likely to result in more visits to Scunthorpe Town Centre.
- 6.2 Option B: May involve the direction of customers to the Humber Bridge Board website thereby making more use of the electronic service. It may result in more visits to the Humber Bridge Board offices during crossings. The Bridge Board may need to consider how it can better market the sale of bridge tickets to its customers.
- 6.3 Option C: None

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The council's position on Humber Bridge Tolls is well known. This report primarily seeks to achieve operational efficiencies for council services. It should be stressed, if Option A is approved, it would still mean the sale of tickets at Church Square House. This is despite the council receiving no financial support from the Bridge Board to cover the cost of doing so. The council has vigorously opposed the latest planned toll increase sought by the Bridge Board. It has argued, including at the March Public Inquiry, that an increase would be damaging to the local economy and adversely affect North Lincolnshire residents. However, a decision is expected on this at any time from the Government. If another increase is approved, it is likely to be very unpopular with bridge users. It would not have the support of the council.
- 7.2 The bridge-master has been made aware of our intention. He has indicated he is to bring the matter to the meeting of the Bridge Board for information.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Cabinet Member approval is given to option A, thereby consolidating the sale of Humber Bridge tickets to Church Square House, despite no financial support forthcoming from the Humber Bridge Board to help offset the council's costs.
- 8.2 Customers are given notice that the change will take effect from 1 July 2009, which could also coincide with an increase in the Humber Bridge toll, if approved by the Secretary of State for Transport.
- 8.3 The decision at paragraph 8.1 above be reviewed after a period of 12 months, with a further report to the Corporate Services Cabinet Member.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report

- Cabinet report on Humber Bridge Tolls, September 2008
- Cabinet report on Humber Bridge Tolls research findings, October 2008
- Statement by North Lincolnshire Council's Chief Executive to Humber Bridge Tolls Public Inquiry, March 2009.