



PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

INDIVIDUAL DECISION BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR FINANCE & ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

TOPIC – OPTIMISING SPACE USE IN COUNCIL OFFICES

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Part 4, Section 22 of the Council's Constitution provides for a decision to be made by an individual member of Cabinet.

In accordance with the Procedure Rules, the Chief Operating Officer, the Chief Executive and the Chief Finance Officer are consulted together with Chairman and Vice Chairman of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee and any other relevant overview and scrutiny committee. In addition, all Members are notified.

If five or more Members from those informed so request, the Leader may require the matter to be referred to Cabinet for determination.

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SUMMARY

As the then Leader announced in October 2013, the City Council is considering options for the refurbishment or replacement of the City Offices, and is drawing up a business case as a basis for Members to decide how they wish to move matters forward.

One option is to demolish the existing building and replace it with a new build extension of the Guildhall, which will offer an opportunity to better integrate all the Council's teams on a single site in a modern working environment. If that approach is to be taken, the Council will need to follow best practice in the use of space, minimising the build footprint, and so build cost, by looking at our working practices and demand for desk, meeting and other space.

This Notice seeks approval of expenditure to employ external advisors on space use planning.

DECISION

That:

- 1) a sum up to a maximum of £10,000 be made available from Estates Team budget to allow the Council to seek independent advice on space use planning; and
- 2) the Chief Executive be authorised to appoint appropriate consultants in accordance with the Council's Procurement Rules.

REASON FOR THE DECISION AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

The City Offices were originally built in the early 1970s. The form of construction meant they had a limited life, even with full repair and maintenance. They are now in a poor state of repair, and do not provide a good working environment for the 300 or so staff who are based in the building. Members have agreed that options for refurbishing or replacing the City Office building should be considered.

It is proposed that a business case which will set out three options be brought to Cabinet in the late autumn. Those options will be: i) to refurbish the existing building, ii) to locate staff in other properties around the city, or iii) to build an extension to the West Wing of the Guildhall to accommodate staff. One key component of the decision will be the relative cost of each option.

All options, but particularly i) and iii), will require careful thinking about how the space made available is used to best effect. This is not simply a matter of cost, although clearly if space is used efficiently the Council will require a smaller building footprint, with a consequent reduction in building and running costs. It is also vital that, as the Council seeks to be a more flexible, responsive organisation, so we ensure our working environment encourages cross-team working. This is an opportunity to ensure we are adopting best practice in how we work.

The Council has encouraged flexible working for some years now, and we have a broad mix of part-time staff and home-workers, as well as many staff whose roles mean they spend a significant part of their time out of the office. We now deploy a mix of desks and touch-down stations for short-term use, and seek where possible to ensure all desks are made full use of. However, we need to look critically at our working practices, both to ensure they allow us to meet evolving expectations of the Council and make best use of building space.

If we are to make the most efficient use of new or refurbished space, then we should:

- continue to promote flexible working, including home working;
- minimise the number of desks which are vacant at any one time;
- make full use of compact touch-down stations for staff spending only a brief period of time in the office;

- make full use of IT to support new and flexible ways of working;
- ensure we make full use of existing meeting rooms, including in the Guildhall;
- clarify what other space is required for efficient operation, ranging from 1:1 meeting rooms through breakout space to facilities for teams such as Parking or for our Members;
- draw on best practice from the public and private sectors.

Officers have spent some time exploring how we can continue to promote flexible working, and how best to configure the working environment to make best use of space. However, this is a specialist area and we would benefit from an independent assessment of what can be done to minimise our space requirements, whilst at the same time promoting flexible, cross-team working. We also need to recognise that we must balance efficient use of space with the expectations our staff rightly have of us providing a good quality environment for them to work in.

It is therefore recommended that officers be authorised to appoint specialist space use advisors to help inform future decisions on our office facilities.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

It is estimated this advice is likely to cost no more than £10,000. That sum can be met from within the Estates Team's budget.

CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN ON THE DECISION

There has to date been no broad consultation with Members, the public or other parties on any options for replacing or refurbishing City Offices. The work proposed is a technical piece of work which will help shape options, which will then be the subject of wider consultation.

In undertaking their work, the appointed advisors would be expected to seek the views of the teams affected.

FURTHER ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED FOLLOWING PUBLICATION OF THE DRAFT PORTFOLIO HOLDER DECISION NOTICE

n/a

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS BY THE DECISION MAKER OR A MEMBER OR OFFICER CONSULTED

n/a

DISPENSATION GRANTED BY THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

n/a

Approved by: (signature)

Date of Decision: 15.09.14

**Councillor Stephen Godfrey – Portfolio Holder for Finance & Organisational
Development**