

Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cabinet	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	11 February 2021	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3261
TITLE:	Preparing for the Future Programme (Review of Office Accommodation)	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report:		
Appendix 1 - Draft design concept of upper floors of Keynsham Civic Centre		

## **1 THE ISSUE**

- 1.1 The impact of the Covid pandemic has meant that the majority of office based staff at the Council have been working from home for the last 10 months and will continue to do so for some months to come. Most staff have adapted well to completing their work from a different environment and, in common with many organisations, we are now taking the opportunity to consider how we will work differently in the future.
- 1.2 A previous review of our office accommodation has shown us that Keynsham Civic Centre has been under-utilised for some time as the space is not being used effectively. A re-design of the internal space will allow us to improve utilisation and capacity of this office building and contribute to delivering existing budget savings in the Estates service from a reduction in our office buildings.
- 1.3 The Preparing for the Future Programme will deliver changes to how we work which will streamline our use of office buildings and provide a more flexible workforce that reflects the changes in how we now work and how we will deliver services in the future. The aim is to equip all staff to have a good day's work by providing them with the right technology, enabling blended working, being flexible in our approach to promote wellbeing and ensuring an effective work/life balance.

## **2 RECOMMENDATION**

**The Cabinet is asked to;**

- 2.1 Agree the aims of the Preparing for the Future programme and to note the progress that has been made with the programme to date.

### **3 THE REPORT**

#### **Background**

- 3.1 The Council has for some time been reviewing the way we work as part of the Improving How We Work Programme. Prior to the Covid pandemic progress had been made on plans to adapt Keynsham Civic Centre to improve utilisation, create greater flexibility and to enable more effective collaboration.
- 3.2 In common with many organisations the pandemic has accelerated the progress of these plans. A great deal has been learnt about how staff have adapted to working flexibly during the last 10 months and this has meant we are able to now consider how a blended working approach, where staff have the choice in how and where they work, is possible for the future.
- 3.3 Two staff wellbeing surveys were carried out last year in April and June when most office based staff were working from home, and a further survey was circulated in December 2020 for which the results are expected soon. 85% of staff who responded to the June survey told us that they felt confident about working from home on a more regular basis in the future with 68% of staff saying they would like to continue working from home for half their working week or more. 83% of staff said they had a safe, comfortable and private place to work at home and only 6% of staff felt they could not work from home at all.
- 3.4 The aim of the Preparing for the Future Programme is therefore to build on the progress made with the Improving How We Work Programme and take on board the results of the staff survey which confirm that the majority of staff would welcome a change to how they work in the future.
- 3.5 The programme includes reducing the number of office buildings we use in Bath and changing the work base for the majority of teams based at St Martin's Hospital, the Guildhall and Lewis House to be based at Keynsham Civic Centre instead. The current arrangements at the Hollies will remain in place.
- 3.6 The programme will enable reduced operating costs through a reduction of office buildings / rationalisation of office space along with the opportunity to create revenue through the commercial letting of Lewis House.
- 3.7 The programme will also enable greater flexibility and increased efficiency of staff who will be provided with the right IT equipment to complement the new ways of working and a Digital, Data and Technology Strategy will be put in place fit for the future which will fully support service delivery.
- 3.8 By changing the way our office buildings are used there will be a break-down of silo working between services and the opportunity for increased collaboration between teams leading to improved staff morale, well-being and productivity. We know that staff value face to face time with their team and colleagues to share ideas, get advice, guidance and mutual support and it is important that our office buildings provide this.
- 3.9 To achieve this there will be an internal re-design of Keynsham Civic Centre which will enhance the space, provide collaboration spaces and improve the

capacity of the office building. There will also be hot desking arrangements in some of our offices in the Guildhall for staff who need touch down spaces in Bath, and some teams will continue to be based there to include the Registration Service, Democratic Services, Elections team and the Records Office.

3.10 Whilst a large majority of office based staff have told us they do want some choice and flexibility in how and where they work we do know that individual circumstances, working styles, and job roles differ and will dictate how flexible staff are able to be, and so managers of teams will be able to discuss the most suitable working arrangements for their staff.

3.11 The aim is to create choices for staff by agreeing reciprocal arrangements with our key partners so that staff have some options about where they work, which are not just at Keynsham Civic Centre or at home. These options could also help to reduce travel time for some staff and increase work life balance.

### Progress to date

3.12 In the first 7 months of the programme of work the following has been delivered:

- Vacation and clear out of equipment and paperwork from St Martins Hospital resulting in a reduction in leasehold costs.
- Vacation and clear out of equipment and paperwork from Lewis House floors 1 – 4. Floors 1 and 2 of Lewis House have been let to Bath University (from Sept 2020). Discussions are ongoing with other potential tenants for floors 3 & 4.
- Vacation and clear out of equipment and paperwork from the Guildhall floor 1 North.
- Covid safe preparation of Keynsham Civic Centre and the Guildhall for some staff to continue to work from there during the pandemic and to enable some staff to return following an individual risk assessment.
- Clear out of equipment and paperwork by some teams in Keynsham Civic Centre to prepare the building for re-design. Recruitment has taken place for a programme manager and a procurement process is underway using our architectural design framework to select a contractor to deliver the re-design.
- An initial purchase of 325 laptops is underway for phase one IT rollout and a review of our Digital, Data and Technology Strategy is ongoing with consultancy support provided by Socitm to ensure we future proof our organisation.
- A communication, change management and engagement plan is in place with staff. Regular written communications are issued to staff and members, and a service user group is in place to allow full consultation with all service areas.

### Next stage

3.13 Keynsham Civic Centre was designed in 2014 and is a traditional office environment with designated service areas which doesn't facilitate across council working and partnership working. As a consequence there has been significant under utilisation of the building. Based on the current layout the

capacity is around 520 staff but by changing the layout early plans show that this will significantly increase (subject to fire regulations) meaning a better user experience and a reduction in cost per head of operating the building.

3.14 The focus for the next stage of the programme is on the re-design of Keynsham Civic Centre to increase capacity, maximise utilisation of the building and enable staff to work differently. We are currently out to procurement using an architectural design framework to select a provider to complete the re-design. Once the procurement stage is complete (end January 2020) there will be a series of engagement workshops to enable the concept designs to be confirmed by the end of March 2020 with the final designs and the technical specification for any works needed by end of June 2020. Whilst the designs are taking shape work will also take place to test prototypes and re-arrange existing furniture to create activity based working areas.

3.15 The architectural design firms have been asked to consider and explore the following possibilities in their concept designs:

- A partnership working space which will enable our key partners to book hot desks on the understanding there will be a reciprocal arrangement in their office buildings
- Removal of some meeting rooms and desks to create team collaboration spaces to include pods with screens and meeting areas as well as touch down areas with high bars and stools for temporary working in between meetings. Small booths will be provided to enable confidential discussions to take place.
- A flexible learning and development / training suite and different zones for different types of work – eg a technology zone housing specialist equipment such as plotters and CAD machines
- Addition of corporate strategy and values branding along with increased use of colour and relevant art to enhance the building and create a sense of belonging
- Resolution of the current equalities issues eg re-naming of areas and better identification of floors and wings

3.16 The aim is to create a workspace that staff *want* to go to in order to collaborate with others. A draft design concept of what could be achieved is contained in appendix 1.

## **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 Consultation is taking place with statutory functions to ensure that services will continue to be delivered efficiently taking into account the blended working approach.

## **5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)**

5.1 To date there has been one officer who has been a dedicated resource to this programme, the Interim Director of Business Recovery funded by the Covid 19 local government grant, with support being provided by reallocating existing colleagues on a largely non-backfilled and part time basis.

- 5.2 The emerging capital budget for the Keynsham Civic Centre redesign programme is as follows. This capital request will form part of the Council considerations on the 2021/22 budget in February 2021.

(000)	21/22	22/23
Refurbishment works (inc furniture)	750	275
Fees (20%)	150	60
Contingency (30%)	225	90
Client PM (temporary post)	70	35
Total	1,195	460

- 5.3 In terms of IT, there is an existing £1.975m capital provision included in the budget for 21/22. A small amount of additional capital (£25k) has been put forward for Council consideration as part of the 21/22 budget setting process.
- 5.4 The Council's current 'Bring Your Own device' (BYOD) policy has caused significant issues during the pandemic as many staff did not have their own suitable IT devices to enable them to work flexibly. The capital budget will therefore be used to equip our workforce to enable the blended working approach, develop the IT/digital infrastructure and ensure continued improvements to both our internal and external facing systems.
- 5.5 The vacation of St Martins Hospital along with the commercial letting of the majority of Lewis House will contribute to existing savings already built into Estate revenue budgets.

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

## **7 EQUALITIES**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on the Preparing for the Future Programme in August 2020 and an improvement plan is in place. A number of impacts were identified, all with mitigating actions and a service user group is in place to enable full consultation with staff. The council's Inclusive Communities Manager is part of the council officer group leading this project and her advice and guidance is being considered as the project develops.

## **8 CLIMATE CHANGE**

- 8.1 The streamlining of our office buildings and reducing the need to travel by further applying and encouraging blended working will contribute to our core policy of addressing the climate emergency in Bath.
- 8.2 The aim will be to improve the facilities at Keynsham Civic Centre for staff who cycle, walk or run to work to encourage sustainable travel choices. Commuting to the building will be limited to two or three days a week and travel between Keynsham and Bath for meetings will reduce as a significant proportion of our staff business mileage (and Co2) comes from inter- office face to face meetings

(and return to base) on the Bath/Keynsham corridor. A combination of home working/office based virtual meeting use / more efficient office occupancy and low emission/E.V. pool cars will see those business trips, along with expenses and CO2, significantly reduced.

8.3 When it was built in 2014, Keynsham Civic Centre was an award winning building for its high environmental performance. Officers are working closely with our surveyors as we develop the proposals to ensure that as a minimum this environmental performance is not compromised and that we identify any opportunities to improve environmental performance. In order for the carbon savings to be fully realised from this building the space needs to be fully utilised and the internal re-design of the building will support this aim.

8.4 The annual travel survey will be circulated in March 2021 which will give us an opportunity to gather data about staff travel and our staff will also be given the opportunity to take part in a Leeds University, Institute for Transport, research project in the coming weeks which will explore attitudinal behaviours towards travel in a post COVID world.

## 9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 The Council could retain the current office building estate and associated costs, but would not be capitalising on the opportunity that the pandemic has presented us with. It is clear that the as a result of Covid the world of work is set to change on a permanent basis. It is recognised that organisations which proactively respond to the opportunities afforded by the pandemic and reorganise their arrangements, are most likely to have a more effective recovery.

## 10 CONSULTATION

10.1 This report has been agreed by the Chief Operating Officer, S151 Officer and Monitoring Officer.

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<b>Background papers</b>	<i>Cabinet Paper – 10 December 2020, Property Services – Service Review:</i>  <i><a href="https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s63758/E3244%20Property%20Services%20Service%20Review.pdf">https://democracy.bathnes.gov.uk/documents/s63758/E3244%20Property%20Services%20Service%20Review.pdf</a></i>
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Draft design concept of upper floors of Keynsham Civic Centre

