

Report to Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 26 February 2019



Subject: Call-In – Accommodation Strategy

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Committee note the withdrawal of a call-in relating to elements of the council's current Accommodation Strategy.

1. In accordance with Article 6 (Overview and Scrutiny) of the Constitution, the requisite number of members called in the following decision of the Cabinet, arising from its meeting held on 10 December 2019:
 - (1) That the Cabinet approve the accommodation option to maximise the Civic building use in Epping High Street by:
 - (a) retaining Civic, Democratic and Customer Service functions on the Epping site;
 - (b) delivering a combination of partner, community and business services from the Civic building;
 - (c) refurbishing the areas of the Civic building to the standards appropriate for the use (subject to b) above);
 - (d) the disposal of land to the rear of the Civic site in line with the Local Plan allocation;
 - (e) building office accommodation on Council owned land in North Weald for occupation by the Council and potentially partner organisations; Cabinet 10 December 2018;
 - (2) That consequent to the approval of recommendation (1) above the following actions be taken:
 - (a) that the Council proceed to full design and build specification of a new build reporting back to the Cabinet before the end of the financial year 2018/2019 seeking agreement to proceed to the procurement of the new build process and its Capital requirement;
 - (b) that the Cabinet agree £425,000 capital expenditure for professional services and programme resource to deliver year 1 of the programme met from the existing planned maintenance budget phased as follows: virements of £25,000 in 2018/19 and £400,000 in 2019/20;
 - (c) that land allocated within the local plan to the rear of the civic site be marketed for sale, with the sale to be progressed before end of the financial year 2019/20;
 - (d) that authority be given to the Chief Executive to 'soft' market test the letting of areas of the Civic building spaces as marked on appendix A of the report;
 - (3) That a further report be made to Cabinet on:

- (a) the feasibility of the marketing of the part site before the end of the financial year 2018/2019;
 - (b) the revisions required to the accommodation programme to align it with these recommendations;
 - (c) the formation of a governance structure to support effective and efficient delivery across the programme; and
 - (4) That the Cabinet receive regular updates on the programme to future meetings.
2. The call-in of the decision of the Cabinet was made on the following summary grounds:
 - (a) the current economic conditions in terms of cost savings to support relocation;
 - (b) the likely proceeds to be achieved from the sale of the Council's property in light of a deteriorating residential sales market;
 - (c) the provision of an updated cost plan allowing for inflation and rising construction costs;
 - (d) the likely rental stream to be obtained from letting the Council's existing offices and assumptions in terms of the rent-free and void periods required to achieve lettings;
 - (e) detailed estimates of the costs associated with remodelling the Civic Offices building to facilitate multi-letting;
 - (f) the negative effect of relocation on businesses within the High Street at a time when retail is under immense pressure;
 - (g) the unsustainable location of the proposed new Council office from an accessibility perspective and the need for transport initiatives;
 - (h) the effect of the proposed move on the efficiency of the operation of the Council, including the interface with the public, the retention of the existing staff and the ability to attract new staff members who do not live in the immediate locality;
 - (i) demonstration that the extra costs and additional risk of relocation is justified by non-financial benefits; and
 - (j) the mitigation of risks associated with the relocation project.
 3. In accordance with Article 6 of the Constitution, the lead signatory to the call-in requested a meeting with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to the call-in being considered by the Committee (if necessary), to discuss the possibility of reaching agreement on removing any objection to the decision which are raised in the call-in request.
 4. The lead signatory to the call-in has been satisfied as to the action proposed to be taken with regard to this element of the Accommodation Strategy and the assurances made that the relocation project will seek to achieve timely, accurate, future-proofed costs and income information across several work streams, including the sale of the land to the rear of the Civic Offices, the new-build office accommodation and the marketing of rental space at the Civic Offices. The lead signatory has recognised that necessary due diligence will be undertaken at all stages of the project and has formally withdrawn the call-in submission, on which no further action need be taken.
 5. The Committee is requested to note the withdrawal of the call-in relating to elements of the council's current Accommodation Strategy.

Resource Implications:

The recommendations of this report ensure compliance with Article 6 (Overview and Scrutiny) of the Constitution.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council's constitution sets out rules for the management of its overview and scrutiny responsibilities.

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications:

There are no implications arising from the recommendations of this report in respect of the Council's commitment to the Climate Local Agreement, the corporate Safer, Cleaner, Greener initiative, or any crime and disorder issues within the district.

Consultation Undertaken:

None required.

Background Papers:

None

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The Council's constitution sets out rules for the management of its overview and scrutiny responsibilities.

Equality:

There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations of this report.