

## **Report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**



**Date of meeting: 19 November 2019**



**Subject: Transformation Programme – Accommodation Strategy**

**Responsible Officer:** Sacha Jevans (01992 564229)

**Democratic Services:** Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

---

### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**(1) That the current progress with the Accommodation Strategy be noted.**

### **Report:**

1. The April 2019 Cabinet decision and subsequent additional requests from members for more detailed information (specifically greater guarantees on the cost benefit case of a new build) led to more detailed work across the four workstreams:

- (i) Refurbishment of Civic Offices;
- (ii) Sale of land at the back of Condor Building;
- (iii) Recruitment of partner/tenants for the civic offices; and
- (iv) Construction of new building.

2. The agility and mobility of the EFDC workforce enabled by digital improvement and a cultural shift in ways of working has been significant and achieved at pace. The elements of the People Strategy that have had greatest impact include the investment in the Common Operating model and the Decision Making and Accountability model (DMA) implementation where restructures have focussed on Management and Leadership skills. Our people are working in ways that are more Customer Focussed, Effective and Efficient. A positive outcome of this work is the opportunity to evaluate the current organisation shape and working methods of our people and then revisit accommodation options before further decisions are made.

3. The October Cabinet decision reviewed the detailed work on design and cost analysis of the refurbishment of the civic offices and agreed the recommendation to proceed with the next stages of the project. Cabinet also agreed the recommendation to not pursue the construction of a new build office on the North Weald Airfield.

4. The new design plans demonstrate that if the building is refurbished to create more open plan space then all (required) EFDC staff can be accommodated on a 7:10 ratio in the Civic Offices without the need to move or build an alternative office. This decision negates the cost of building a new office and reduce the operating cost of maintaining two buildings. Maximising the use of the Civic Offices through refurbishment will also expedite the vacation of the Condor building for redevelopment through the new Development Company. Further

feasibility on this site is being undertaken and will be subject of future Cabinet decision before any work to progress the site is commenced.

5. The Corporate priorities within Stronger Council workstream consists of the People Strategy, Accommodation Strategy and Digital Enablement. This gives complete visibility across interdependent programmes and ensures key decisions across all programmes are cognisant of the dependencies and outcomes being achieved real time. Successful outcomes from both the People and Technology workstreams have made a positive difference to the accommodation programme in terms of accommodation requirements.

6. The total EFDC people required to work from the Civic offices is 386. The current plans create an agile open plan space with some fixed desks and many meeting rooms or break out spaces supported by 2 x kitchens and WC/shower facilities on each floor. The Ground floor will provide an improved layout and access for customers with the ability to include partners such as the library, CCG and Citizens Advice (CA). Indicative designs are being prepared to enable the café area to be accessed by the public creating a work, food, beverage space. This element of the project would require a full planning application. The internal changes will require Listed Building consent only.

7. The Civic Offices is a listed building and therefore there are some constraints within the refurbishment project, for example the council chamber is listed and therefore would not be altered in the proposed refurbishment. The ground floor could be converted to create a large conference facility space capable of accommodating 200 people. The space will include moveable partitions that can create smaller meeting room spaces and committee rooms. The discussions with the library are at an early stage and whilst they have suggested the bay area on the ground floor this is yet to be concluded and further updates will be provided as discussions develop.

8. The new refurbishment proposal is based upon EFDC staff occupying the office accommodation. The previous decision was to let out floors 1 and 2 to third parties. The refurbishment needs are the same albeit the tenants occupying the spaces remain as EFDC. The recommendation retains the ground floor café to ensure collaborative meet, greet, work and eat space is available. The recommendation retains the focus on Customer with ongoing partner co location an aim of the programme.

9. In order to achieve a refurbishment project of this scale there will be a significant amount of work required for the decanting of the Civic Offices. Initial indications show that all the existing staff and the customer services function can be temporarily decanted into the Condor Building for the period of the build works. The Council Chamber and Committee rooms will not be accessible as the building will require complete vacation due to the extent of the works. A separate decant programme will be initiated to manage all the Democratic/member services during the period between June 2020 – December 2020. This will require identification of off-site functions.

10. Indicative costs of the refurbishment work have now been completed at a total cost of £6.6m excluding VAT (attached to appendix 1). These are medium range and include all mechanical/electrical and capital works required to create a further 30-year lifecycle. Now that cabinet approval to proceed has been granted further detailed work will be undertaken to refine the scope of works and costs.

11. The cost report is based on the indicative designs attached to Appendix 2 of the report. Costs currently exclude decant and ICT infrastructure costs which have been estimated at £180k (decant) and £200k (ICT). It should be noted that as the more detailed cost work is undertaken these estimates may change and are indicative only at this stage.

12. The key project timelines are set out below:

- (i) Listed Building Consent application- Quarter 3 and 4 2019/2020;
- (ii) Contract Tender Process – Quarter 4 2019/20;
- (iii) Decant of staff into Condor Building – Quarter 4 2019/2020; and
- (iv) Works Period – Quarter 1 – Quarter 4 2020/2021.

13. A detailed decant strategy is being prepared to move staff and members during the period required to undertake the works. It is proposed that a consultation exercise will be undertaken with Members to understand the specific requirements. The Council Chamber is an area which cannot be changed due to the 'listing' and therefore there is no planned change to this area. It is however proposed that the committee rooms will be located on the ground floor area (indicated on the plan as the conference facility). This is an area which can be divided into different size meeting rooms depending on requirements. Initial indications show that all EFDC staff can be accommodated in the existing buildings on a 7:10 ratio. The detailed decant strategy will cover:

- Member consultation
- Staff consultation
- Communication plan
- ICT infrastructure requirements
- Temporary works
- Customer reception areas

#### **Resource Implications:**

The current budget for the accommodation project is £425k. This is covering the costs of the specialist services required to deliver the design and delivery elements of the accommodation strategy. Given the cabinet approval to proceed cost consultants will be undertaking more detailed work and therefore it should be noted these are indicative only at this stage. The budget for the cost of the refurbishment works have been included in the medium term financial strategy. At the November Cabinet, it is intended also to compare the resource implications and benefits of the proposed option against other options considered.

The total costs and benefits arising from this project together will again be re-evaluated at the end of November and summarised. These figures will be against the cost of other option no longer in play, e.g. relocate office staff at North Weald to ensure value for money continues to be delivered.

Draft charges have also been calculated for those occupying designated space, using space flexible and for making just occasional use of space, e.g. hiring the meeting rooms. These will be update by the end of November so that they reflect the lasts costs and EFDC's role in sustaining and supporting partnership working.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

Any professional consultancy services will be procured in line with the Council procurement rules. The Civic Offices site has a draft allocation of housing within the Local Plan to be bought forward in the early years. There is a Governance Board in place and regular reports of progress back to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny.

**Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

The refurbished building and will be safer by design and energy efficient.

**Consultation Undertaken:**

Consultation with Partners to potentially occupy the Civic Offices continues. Consultation will commence with member on the requirements and design. There will be a full consultation and communication plan for EFDC through the project delivery phases.

**Background Papers:**

Cost Consultant report on indicative costs for the refurbishment of the Civic Offices  
Proposed refurbishment Plans for the Civic

**Risk Management:**

A risk map has been developed and is reviewed monthly by the Accommodation Programme Board with mitigating actions reviewed. Key risks identified are:

1. Failure to achieve Listed Building Consent
2. Delays and disruption to services through the decant period
3. Major incident on site
4. Interruption of CCTV and safer neighbourhoods team
5. Failure in staff/member communications.
6. Impact of cost and time overruns on the project.