

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Extraordinary Council Meeting

Date of Meeting: 23 November 2023

Report Title: Minute No. 146/9/23 – Civic Centre Relocation

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Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Noel Ovenden (Leader)
Portfolio Holder for: Prosperity and Resource



Summary:

This report responds to Full Council's request for additional information in relation to the proposed move to International House that will:-

- Make significant savings without an impact on jobs or services
- Deliver asset rationalisation reducing portfolio risk
- Realise a future development opportunity

Part of the response to the Council's request re was a presentation to all Members on the 7 November 2023 around the financial implications of moving to International House delivered by Lee Foreman. Members also had an opportunity to ask officers questions on the proposal.

Some wider discussion around the future of the Civic Centre and the future 'look/status' of a new Council Chamber in International House were discussed and this report has provided some further narrative, direction around these points raised.

Key Decision: YES

Significantly Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: The Council is asked to resolve the recommendations below as detailed in agenda item 9 of the Cabinet report dated 28 September 2023:-

- I. Approve the relocation of the Civic Centre to International House including Phase 1 & Phase 2.
- II. Note Phase 3 which will include a future report to Cabinet detailing the future use of the Civic Centre.

Policy Overview: This report brings forward a savings proposal, the relocation

of the Civic Centre to International House, put forward by the last administration, following the reported budget gap that required a savings plan to be drawn up.

Following pressure on the MTFP and savings being identified this project would not only contribute to critical savings but also contributes to the following corporate objectives;

GP1 – reduce reliance on fossil fuels in line with our carbon neutral targets

CA1 – Homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meets the needs of local people of all ages, incomes and abilities to live sustainably and safely

TG1 – Increase productivity and job opportunities and the establishment of sustainable, knowledge based and creative industries in the borough.

Financial Implications:

A move to International House will result in annual savings in the region of £1.3m going forward.

The MTFP report presented to Cabinet in October 2023, Agenda Item 8 (please see tabled paper) was updated to reflect the lack of certainty around this proposed move to International House, and added a further pressure of £6.3m over the next 5 years, which will need to be funded from savings, on top of the £1.5m still needed if this move is not approved.

Legal Implications:
*Text as per
September 2023
Cabinet report*

The project will involve some variations and/or terminations of existing leases, contracts etc. and entering into new service and other agreements.

This work is now being scoped and authority to enter into such new or revised arrangements is sought within the recommendations. Staff contract terms and conditions will need to reflect new working locations.

Equalities Impact Assessment:

As per Appendix C of September 2023 Cabinet Report.

Data Protection Impact Assessment:

As per Appendix D of September 2023 Cabinet Report.

Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):

There is a risk over how this project will be perceived by the public, this is a project which saves money and protects services that our residents rely on. This will need to be communicated effectively to the public.

This project will deliver a considerable saving for the Council and support our medium term financial plan. Failure to

deliver this saving will have wide ranging consequences on the way the council operates.

Sustainability Implications:

The Council will be working to bring International House up to new EPC standards over the next few years and this work would be required whether the Council relocate to International House or not.

The Civic Centre will require decarbonisation works but these will be addressed by the new owner (or the HRA) during the redevelopment of the building should the Council move forward with this proposal.

Exempt from Publication:

Yes (Presentation Appended, as commercially sensitive information)

Not For Publication by virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information

Background Papers:

None

Contact:

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Introduction and Background

1. This report responds to Full Council's request for additional information in relation to the proposed move to International House.
2. This proposal was first referenced in February 2023 as part of the [Budget 2023/24](#) report to Cabinet (Agenda Item 8, Appendix O) where it was identified as a proposed budget saving of £300,000, we now know this saving is potentially much higher based on future capital spend required on the Civic Centre.
3. Following approval to explore this opportunity the Council undertook this work and a report on the proposal was presented to Cabinet (Agenda Item 9) on 28 September 2023 [Civic Centre Relocation](#) with the following recommendations:-
 - a. The Cabinet is asked to recommend to Council to:-
 - I. Approve the relocation of the Civic Centre to International House including Phase 1 & Phase 2
 - II. Note Phase 3 which will include a future report to Cabinet detailing the future use of the Civic Centre
 - III. Authorise the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer to negotiate, finalise and complete all necessary legal agreements and other documents to give effect to the above.
4. Following debate at Cabinet the recommendations were progressed to Full Council on the 19th October 2023 where they were asked "To receive, consider, and adopt the recommendations set out in the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on the 28th September 2023"
5. Following debate at Full Council, it was resolved that ***Minute No. 146 be deferred to a future Council meeting, ideally as soon as possible, to allow for the information requested to be supplied to all Members of the Council before making a final decision.***
6. The reason for the deferral was to ***"allow for a further briefing and a report to all Members which would include: - the additional financial information on Phases 1 and 2 and some high level information, which was currently available, on future plans for the Civic Centre site (Phase 3)"***.
7. Following this deferral, a presentation was made to All Members on the 7 November 2023 to provide further financial understanding and rationale behind the information that underpin the financial rationale for the move. (The presentation slides are appended separately to this report and is marked as **Exempt** from publication as it contains commercially sensitive information).

8. The presentation was held in the committee room at the Civic Centre, and also via Microsoft Teams, the recording was then made available for all members including those who could not attend.
9. The presentation was well attended by Members and a detailed discussion was had around the finances and a few wider discussions.
10. From the wider discussion it was evident that there were ongoing concerns around the lack of certainty around the future plans for the Civic Centre and what a future Council Chamber would look like.

Future of the Civic Centre (Phase 3)

11. The Council has added the Civic Centre development to the architects brief for Kent Woolgrowers (KWG) which the Leader requested when we were purchasing the KWG site.
12. The intention is the sites will come together and be delivered with a real 'Placemaking' opportunity with the link from the Ashford International station across KWG and through to both the Town Centre and the North Park along the river front.
13. Our architects have looked at the initial concepts of a conversion of the Civic Centre, so very initial designs but really to demonstrate the potential possibilities that would help to indicate the apartment numbers, and how the building would add to the KWG site. A confidential presentation will be sent to all Members prior to the Council Meeting that will incorporate the initial concepts.
14. There are no costings yet as that is a costly piece of work that we would not want to commence until the decision that we are moving from the Civic Centre has been made to avoid abortive costs. We are confident that the combined opportunity of the two sites will bring about a viable mixed tenure scheme which will include much needed social housing.

Future of the Council Chamber

15. Officers have taken on board the comments from Members, and have found a number of other Councils that have modernised their Council Chambers. Two examples West Oxfordshire District Council see link [West Oxfordshire District Council chamber to be updated to make new community space \(westoxon.gov.uk\)](https://www.westoxon.gov.uk) and Crawley Borough Council, see link [Consarc_Crawley-Town-Hall-Interiors-web.pdf](#).
16. It is felt that these schemes could be used to encourage debate with members about developing a new chamber that strikes the right balance between, providing a focal point for Council decisions, and and costs associated with retaining the current building.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

17. A Staff Consultation and Public Consultation have been undertaken and were reported within the Equality Impact Assessment that was presented in the September 2023 Cabinet Report.

Other Options Considered

18. As per September 2023 Cabinet Report.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

19. As per September 2023 Cabinet Report.

Next Steps in Process

20. A detailed project plan to be developed to ensure works progress as soon as possible.
21. Project teams will be reviewed and updated to deliver the move to International House, this will include a member working group to shape the future of the Council Chamber.
22. Officers are currently finalising plans, working with tenants in International House for additional space to accommodate the whole Council and working with International House tenants on the use of the reception area and other shared spaces.
23. Once approved Council Officers will work on the procurement to secure a works contract and other contracts that will be required, such as moving company and temperature control solutions.

Conclusion

24. To ensure the Council can reduce the savings required in the Medium Term Financial Plan, the move to International House is a sound commercial decision.

Contact and Email

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