

EX18. Strategic Property Review – Review of Office Accommodation

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which provided a review of Council office requirements in support of the Council's Strategic Property Review. The report included:-

- an assessment of the current office estate
- an update on the Council's anticipated requirements for front and back office accommodation
- an update on the Council's civic headquarters (HQ) project including an arts centre as a replacement for Falkirk Town Hall with options on how this should proceed
- recommendations on the way forward.

The review assessed the Council's office portfolio and concluded that it occupied property inefficiently and that urgent investment was required. The Municipal Buildings was evaluated to be at the end of its useful life and refurbishment would cost in excess of a new build replacement. The current situation was not sustainable and would lead to unacceptable levels of risk in terms of:-

- threats to business continuity
- operating a costly and inefficient portfolio
- occupying properties in historic and inappropriate locations
- being unsuited to new ways of working
- inefficient energy use and failure to meet Climate Change obligations

The review recommended a modernised, corporate approach to future office provision with a space standard of 8sqm/FTE and 80% workspace per FTE. The review was split into two main elements: Front Facing Requirements, and Back Office/Civic HQ Requirements.

Front facing requirements would be delivered at the locality hubs and at Brockville social work office. Two scenarios had been developed to deliver the requirements for back office/civic HQ provision:-

Scenario 1 - A small scale new build office HQ (c100 workstations) and arts centre on the Municipal Buildings site with refurbishment of 3 of the larger existing office buildings (the Forum, Abbotsford House and the vacant space at the Falkirk Stadium). This scenario also suggested that Falkirk Community Trust relocate to Grangemouth Sports Complex. It anticipated a delivery cost of c£31.9m (£1.8m annually)

Scenario 2 - A new build back office HQ for all back office staff (c900 workstations) and an arts centre on the existing Municipal Buildings site. This scenario anticipated a delivery cost of c£50.5m (£2.5m annually).

Councillor Meiklejohn, seconded by Councillor Bouse, moved that the Executive agrees:-

- (1) to rationalise the Council's front and back office accommodation as proposed in the report;
- (2) that the office rationalisation programme identified in para 6.3 of the report be agreed to enable delivery of the Council's future office accommodation with further work to be reported back to the Executive for decision;
- (3) that a more detailed option appraisal exercise be undertaken on sites at the Municipal Buildings, Grahamston and Callander Square to provide recommendations on a preferred solution and location for the civic headquarters and arts centre. This should also include a decoupling of the Office accommodation and the Arts centre, with exploration of the refurbishment of the existing council owned sites such as Abbotsford House and the Falkirk Stadium to accommodate modern and flexible working practices increasing capacity. Options for an Arts and Civic Centre be treated as a separate project from office accommodation and the specification and capacity requirements adjusted accordingly. Recommendations to be brought back on preferred solution and location;
- (4) to proceed in the interim with:
 - (a) delivery of front-facing office accommodation on a 'spend to save' basis as suggested in para. 4.6 of the report
 - (b) fitting out of the vacant office space at the Falkirk Community Stadium for resilience purposes at a cost of £1m, to be funded from Strategic Property Review funds contained in the general services capital programme, and
- (5) to conduct an appraisal of suitable town centre sites for disposal to assist with delivery of the civic HQ project and arts centre.

By way of an amendment, Councillor Goldie, seconded by Councillor Nimmo, moved that the Executive agrees to:-

- (1) reject the proposed refurbishment of Abbotsford House and the Falkirk Community Stadium, and
- (2) continue consideration of the remaining matters to the meeting of the Executive on 14 August 2018 to allow the Administration to formulate proposals on the HQ replacement.

In terms of Standing Order 22.1, the vote was taken by roll call, there being 12 members present with voting as undernoted:-

For the motion (5) – Councillors Alexander, Bouse, Garner, Hughes and Meiklejohn.

For the amendment (7) – Councillors Bissett, Coombes, Goldie, Harris, Kerr, Nicol and Nimmo.

Decision

The Executive agreed the amendment.