

North Somerset Council

Report to the Partnerships, Corporate Organisation and Overview Management Policy and Scrutiny Panel (PCOM)

Date of meeting: 2 March 2023

Subject of report: Accommodation Strategy

Town or Parish: All

Officer presenting: Amy Webb, Director of Corporate Services

Key Decision: NO

Reason:

Report is for information.

Recommendations

The panel is asked to note and discuss the contents of this report.

1. Summary of report

To provide PCOM Policy and Scrutiny Panel with an update on the Accommodation Strategy Programme.

2. Policy

This project supports the aims and objective within the Council's Corporate Plan, Economic Plan, Climate Emergency Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy.

3. Background

Council decisions

In February 2021, the Council agreed to:

- The adoption of the following corporate strategies:
 - Strategic Asset Management & Property Plan (SAMPP)
 - Accommodation Strategy (AS)
 - Development Strategy (DS)
- Feasibility and Business Cases proceed, in relation to the recommendations arising from these strategies
- The allocation of capital funding to progress these strategies
- To deliver in accordance with the key timelines of June 21, October 21 and March 22 and utilise the findings of the business cases to inform the Council's 5-year Capital Programme

Accommodation Strategy overview

- NSC undertook an organisation-wide Office Amalgamation Programme and an ICT Transformation Programme between 2007 – 2012
- This programme improved desk ratios from 1:1 to 7:10 (based on 1200 staff = 840 workstations)
- Since this programme, overall staff numbers across NSC have reduced from c.1800 to c.1400 and this will have impacted on office space requirements
- COVID-19 has increased the amount of flexible working and there is a clear acceptance from managers and staff to maintain a flexible working model into the future

In February 2021, the Council agreed to the progression of the accommodation strategy in order to find the optimum flexible working model which takes in to account the following drivers:

- Reduced staff travel linked to our climate change ambition
- Improved work: life balance due to reduced commutes
- Improved productivity
- Opportunity to reduce our asset base in line with our Medium Term Financial Planning (MTFP)

The Council acknowledged that this work could lead to the closure of Castlewood, but this was not a primary driver.

Budget

A budget of £2m was approved (capital expenditure) for the Town Hall works. Progressing the move from Castlewood will release savings of up to £1m a year from 2025, so investment needs to be made in the Town Hall building to support the plans for our new ways of working (hybrid working), to fully adopt and embed the workstyles and to unlock the value from releasing the Castlewood site.

4. Update / progress to date

An update was provided to the Accommodation Strategy Scrutiny Steering Group meeting on 18 January 2023.

Reimagine ways of working

- Final space requirements provided to the design team; following work to accommodate team changes
- Hybrid Policy developed, approved and launched
- Managing in a Hybrid environment – following the pilot in December 2022 to be rolled out to Managers (circa 140)
- The IT offer for equipment (colleagues and spaces) has been defined
- FM Systems (incumbent meeting room booking provider) selected as the preferred supplier for the desk booking system. The existing meeting room system will be updated to integrate with Outlook (instead of the current semi integrated system)
- Hybrid meeting support - testing has been undertaken and options for wireless projection are being investigated; a model meeting room to be set up to demonstrate this

Invest in the Town Hall

A strategic review was undertaken to explore value engineering opportunities, including identifying any costs saving areas that did adversely impact on the design and concept. Subsequently, a strategic pause was agreed to provide the opportunity to review and playback the approach and timescale with key stakeholders and members. The key points to note are:

- The Commissioning and Procurement plan approval was delayed, resulting in an impact to the works programme
- Following approval of the Commissioning and Procurement plan, the date for the appointment of the contractor for the Town Hall works has been adjusted to June 2023
- The appointment of the contractor is now the critical path item
- It is expected that we will be in a position to start on site in September 2023
- The procurement and lead in times are currently estimated and will not be confirmed until the tender returns are received and a contractor identified
- Until the tenders are received and a contractor is appointed, there remains a risk to programme (works and moves) and costs
- These risks will be managed by the team taking cognisance of all elements affecting the construction industry
- Due to the nature of the programme there continues to be a level of unknown and external factors affecting the programme, resulting in continuous risk management which will be required until the latter stages of the project

Timescales

The revised key milestones are set out below:

Contractor appointment	June 2023
Furniture procurement	June – September 2023
Phase 1 works (4 weeks)	*September – October 2023
Phase 2 works (4 weeks)	*October- November 2023
Phase 3 works (4 weeks)	*November – December 2023
Castlewood based staff move in (Group1)	*January 2024

*The dates remain subject to change.

Castlewood – redevelopment and transition and energy reduction

Approval was secured from Council in January 2023 to progress a residential led scheme based on demolition of the existing building.

It was also agreed that a Member Advisory Group would be established. The first meeting of this group is scheduled for 6 March 2023. The group will advise on the criteria for planning and the selection of a developer.

It is recognised that any changes will be a gradual process and vacant possession of Castlewood (2025) is dependent on a number of solutions being delivered by other initiatives. The team will progress the timetable for next steps and colleague consultation.

In addition, work will be accelerated to maximise any opportunities for use of the building and achieve efficiencies and to adopt new ways of working until vacant possession is achieved.

Touchdown locations beyond the Town Hall

The team have been working to understand if and where there is a need for touchdown locations beyond the Town Hall and are exploring what existing sites may be options for colleagues to use and promote and publicise, as well as identifying what solutions may be needed in the future.

A survey has been developed and tested with 2 teams to understand the requirements. The team are making changes to the survey, prior to issuing it wider.

Further work is also being undertaken to replan the touchdown locations workstream once the Castlewood delivery plan is agreed. These dates will also align with the travel and parking delivery plan.

Travel and Parking

The planned development of Locking Road car park triggered a workstream within the Accommodation Strategy Programme and a Working Group was established to ensure delivery of the short, medium and long-term objectives:

- Short-term: Moves to Town Hall
- Medium-term: Locking Road car park vacant possession
- Long-term: Castlewood vacant possession and touchdown locations

The draft Corporate Travel Plan 2023-28 has been developed and work on the short-term travel and parking plan (moves to the Town Hall) is being progressed.

The dates for Locking Road car park are being reviewed, therefore this may no longer be the driver for the workstream and the Corporate Travel Plan will become the new driver. Further work is underway to progress the objectives and deliverables, including engagement with HR.

5. Enablers, links and dependencies on other projects

There are a number of enablers which include IT, HR (People Services), policies and premises, with links and dependencies on other projects to ensure the successful delivery of the programme (new ways of working; the works to the Town Hall and vacant possession of Castlewood), which includes identifying and agreeing suitable accommodation and provision for colleagues, tenants and partners and assets (beyond the Town Hall); requirements and solutions for storage (on and off storage) and travel and parking needs. These are captured on a master dependency log and the team will ensure these are managed.

The programme has inputted and provided requirements and guidance to other projects and will continue to align activity with other projects including the ICT improvement plan.

6. Consultation / Comms and Engagement

Engagement has continued with colleagues, tenants and partners and key stakeholders and will continue to be a focus for the programme.

7. Financial Implications

The current forecast is for the project to be delivered within the £2m budget. The budget costs will be updated with confirmed costs, as the programme progresses and the tender action is closed out.

The team will continue to review and seek to identify any cost saving areas which will not adversely impact on design values and concept and a cost engineering approach will be undertaken to the specification to ensure it remains within the budget envelope.

8. Legal Powers and Implications

N/A

9. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

The team will continue to work closely with colleagues to make sure we are joined up to support the Council's ambition to be a net zero carbon council by 2030 and are working with the Waste Team and the Sustainable Travel teams to ensure:

- The principle of repair, reuse, reduce and recycle will be used for any future, fittings and equipment (FFE)
- Any surplus furniture can be re-purposed in a way that benefits the local community
- The energy efficiency of the Town Hall is assessed and for any changes needed to be considered as part of the design and investment works

10. Risk Management

The register continues to be reviewed and updated, with key risks being reported to the Programme Board. The consultant contract has been extended until the end of May 2023, to manage the identified risk in terms of resources.

11. Equality Implications

An accessibility audit planned for December 2022, has been rescheduled and is expected to be completed by the end of February 2023.

12. Corporate Implications

The Accommodation Strategy has been developed within the overarching priorities contained within the Corporate Plan and the emerging priorities from 2038 Local Plan.

13. Options Considered:

N/A

Author: Amy Webb, Director of Corporate Services

Appendices: None

Background Papers:

Accommodation Strategy – COU 168 Council 23rd February 2021

Accommodation Strategy Update – Strategic Outline Business Case: The future of Castlewood – COU 15th February 2022

Accommodation Strategy Update – Castlewood - 10th May 2022