

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

From: Strategic Director (Corporate)	Report Number: N74
To: Executive and Strategy Committees	Date of meetings: 14 and 17 October 2013

PROPOSED APPROACH TO A REVIEW OF THE COUNCILS' ACCOMMODATION NEEDS AND ASSETS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek authorisation to a review of the Councils' accommodation needs and assets.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Councils undertake a review of their accommodation needs and assets.
- 2.2 That the Strategic Director (Corporate) commissions providers as set out in this report.

The Committee is able to resolve this matter.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The review will require the commissioning of independent experts. There is adequate provision in the Councils' transformation budgets and earmarked reserves.

4. Risk Management

Risk Description	Impact, probability and overall score	Mitigation Measures
That the Councils do not achieve the optimum solution to their accommodation needs	(Impact 4: probability 2) = 8 (high)	The use of independent experts and the engagement of Members and staff
That the Councils are not using their accommodation assets in the most optimum manner	(Impact 3: probability 3) = 9 (high)	The use of independent experts

5. Consultations

- 5.1 The need for a review of the Councils' accommodation needs and assets has been considered and raised by the Public Access Transformation Enquiry Group (TEG) and was one of the key outcomes from a workshop of Executive and Strategy Committee Members, held in late September.

6. Equality Analysis

6.1 At this stage there is no equality impact.

7. Shared Service / Partnership Implications

7.1 The use of the Councils' accommodation is of paramount importance to the future workings of the two Councils. It could also have an impact on any wider-scale future partnership arrangements, such as county-wide service provision.

8. Key Information

8.1 In May 2012, the Councils' Executive and Strategy Committees resolved that in the medium term (3 – 5 years) both HQs would be retained. This would provide flexibility and avoid taking on replacement or alternative accommodation until clarity on the shape of the new integrated structure and the number of staff required, was known. It would also ensure a retained identity for both Councils and retained access for Members.

8.2 The need for a review of the Councils' accommodation needs and assets has been considered and raised by the Public Access TEG and was one of the key outcomes from a workshop of Executive and Strategy Committee Members, held in late September.

Accommodation needs

8.3 Having the right accommodation is critical to the development of the Councils' partnership and it needs to be used so that it contributes to the organisational culture that sees staff and Members working across organisational and team boundaries. For example, accommodation can contribute to this by creating a working environment which supports interaction and collaboration between staff groups.

8.4 This review will also provide the opportunity to align work space with contemporary working styles that improve the well being, motivation, effectiveness and ultimately, efficiency of staff.

8.5 It should also provide the opportunity to ensure that ICT is used to enable staff and Members to work more effectively, whether that is from the office, on site or in the wider workplace. In addition, through improvements in ICT and office automation, the councils are presented with the opportunity of introducing a flexible working culture that improves efficiency.

8.6 The review must also address public access needs.

Accommodation assets

8.7 The two Councils own freehold land on which their offices presently sit. This land is valuable but the assets on it currently represent a financial liability.

8.8 In order to understand where the value is and how each Council can best realise the value contained within their assets it will be necessary to consider:

- Accommodation need
- Shared-building options

- Market / development options for each site
- Public access arrangements.

8.9 In order for this to take place, the Councils should commission commercial land agent skills – an expertise in land and property.

8.10 The proposed approach is:

- a. An initial review to establish the outcome we need to achieve, supported by the scope of the review that would need to be undertaken. This is essentially research, consultation and presentation of options on the outcomes that the Councils could practically achieve within a range of timeframes.
- b. Once the scope of the work and the required outcome has been agreed, suitable options will be established and evaluated. This review would involve a wide range of research and consultation - possibly some community consultation, the development of business cases and assessment of viability.
- c. Once the option has been selected support is likely to be required in a number of disciplines. The type of work required will depend upon the option selected and the resources available within the Councils.

8.11 The Home and Communities Agency (HCA) has a framework contract in place with a range of qualified organisations which could undertake the work required for requirements a. and b. Both Councils have successfully used the framework previously on a range of projects (such as the community infrastructure levy).

8.12 Requirement b. is dependent on Requirement a. and therefore the same organisation could be used to undertake both pieces of work.

8.13 The most suitable commissioning route would be to run a mini competition within the HCA framework for both pieces of work; requesting the potential providers to identify the number of days they would require for requirement a., an estimate of days required for requirement b. and confirm the day rate should additional days be required for requirement b.

8.14 With consultancy support of this type, understanding the approach and capabilities of the providers is essential and the Councils will need to invest appropriately in the selection of a partner for such an important piece of work. A brief will be required for the potential providers, supported possibly by some site visits and provision of key information, together with an evaluation session. The selection process could be completed within four to six weeks.

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