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**Cabinet**

**10 January 2012**

Report of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

**Revision to the Council's Administrative Accommodation Strategy**

**Summary**

1. This report seeks member approval to revise the current approved administrative accommodation strategy in the light of ongoing work for space planning in relation to the move to the new Council headquarters at West Offices.
2. Members are also asked to approve a number of actions arising from the revision to this strategy, as outlined in the report below.

**Background**

3. The current approved strategy for the rationalisation of existing administrative accommodation has been to move from 16 buildings located around the city to 4 buildings (plus the Eco Depot), with the focus of council services being provided from a single office located in the city centre, including an effective and efficient single customer contact centre. The four locations previously approved were West Offices; the Guildhall complex; St Anthonys House; and 50 York Road, Acomb.
4. When approved in December 2005, the administrative accommodation strategy envisaged that the Guildhall would continue to be the centre of democratic activity. The council chamber would continue to be used and the new building design would not include provision of a new chamber. It was also expected that other formal member meetings (Cabinet Member Decision Sessions, Advisory Panels, Scrutiny and Planning) would continue to take place within the existing committee rooms within the Guildhall complex. Political group rooms would also remain on the Guildhall complex. At that time it was agreed that democracy services might have to remain at the Guildhall to

support these functions. The issue of staff moving to and from the new central office to and from the Guildhall was acknowledged as a disadvantage that may have to be lived with.

5. The development of the new Council Headquarters at West Offices means that this building will now offer a range and quantity of secure and accessible meeting rooms able to be used in a flexible way, to a high standard, that would readily support a major part of those political meeting needs outlined above. It is also now clear that the introduction of new ways of working could provide the space required to house all of the democracy staff and political group rooms. This development away from the original thinking for the Guildhall would provide significant benefits of close working between members and officers, and additionally with the public through the customer contact centre.
6. The outcome of the initial space planning work for West Offices has indicated that the new HQ together with the Eco Depot would provide sufficient administrative accommodation to meet the needs of the Council and potentially a number of partners. Members will be aware that a decision was made by Cabinet in October 2011 to exercise the break clause in the lease of 50 York Road, Acomb. Following the recently completed space planning work for locating staff in West Offices, it is appropriate to now review the future of the Guildhall complex and St Anthony's House within the Council's Accommodation Strategy.
7. There are many issues that will influence decisions on the future use and development of the Guildhall complex, including:
  - a. The historic and civic nature of the buildings and those constraints imposed by listed status. The preparation of a Heritage and Conservation plan will provide guidance and understanding on the future potential uses of the building. There are exciting possibilities for its re-use, if it is not substantially required by the Council. In addition, there is the opportunity to examine the Guildhall complex as part of a wider regeneration which would impact on enhancing the vitality and viability of the City Centre as well as improving the river frontage.
  - b. The wish to retain a civic presence at the Guildhall, even if limited to use of the Council Chamber. In addition, the Guildhall is part of the offer in association with the use of

- the Mansion House for weddings, being required on an occasional basis as a catering venue.
- c. Understanding the potential of the Guildhall complex for future use and development and its place within the City. The Guildhall currently forms a venue for a range of community based activities.
  - d. The financial commitment that the council would need to make to conserve, maintain and improve the complex, in an environment where financial resources are at a premium.
8. Current information suggests that there is a need to spend circa £800k on repairs (and not including refurbishment) over the 3-5 years on the Guildhall complex, and similar amounts every five years beyond. This summary is based upon a full survey undertaken in 2007 and covers outstanding planned maintenance works and works necessary to facilitate DDA and operational improvements (the costs reflect 2010 prices). It is important to determine the degree to which the building should be accessible depends upon its future use. If it, and particularly the Council Chamber, remain as the focus of democracy within which open public meetings occur, investment in modern forms of access will be needed. To implement such work within an historic building will be challenging and expensive. A further £200k of work has been undertaken since the report was written in 2007. There is no specific budget for any improvement, alterations or refurbishment to the Guildhall. This needs to be considered alongside other priorities for maintenance and repairs.
9. As part of the space planning work, more detailed assessments are taking place regarding the location of services currently based at St. Anthony's House in either West Offices or the Eco Depot.

### **Consultation**

10. This report has been written in consultation with Council Management Team.

### **Options**

11. Approve or reject the recommendations.

**Analysis of Options**

12. Taking account of these issues, the Council Management Team would recommend that we seek to limit the utilisation of the Guildhall by the Council as much as possible and review the approved administrative accommodation strategy in order that member and democratic activity is based at West Offices. This would make most effective use of available space whilst offering the best opportunity for member engagement with Council staff and customers.
13. In doing so, it is recommended that the Council retains the use of the Council Chamber in the Guildhall for holding of Council meetings. The largest meeting room at West Offices has the capacity to hold Council meetings but not in the current format of a debating chamber. As part of the space planning work for West Offices it is proposed to undertake further work with the political parties to determine their space requirements for the new HQ. As the intention is not to fully utilise the building, then there is now the opportunity to discuss with other organisations the future custodianship of the Guildhall in order to ensure its future use and long term viability and maintenance. In doing so, it is recognised that there is a need to assure the people of York that the council is committed to preserving and conserving its historic buildings.
14. Regarding St Anthonys House, it is intended that staff currently based there can be relocated to either West Offices or the Eco Depot. On this basis, it would be appropriate for the Director of City Strategy to be given authority to consider and implement options for the disposal of this site.

**Council Plan**

15. This report will contribute to a number of the Council's priorities, particularly regarding jobs and growth and the protection of the environment. It will also contribute to developing the Council as a confident, collaborative organisation, focused on its priorities.

## **Implications**

### **Finance**

16. The sale of St. Anthony's House would realise a capital receipt to the council. This level of receipt is unquantified at this time however would be the subject of a further report. The capital programme doesn't currently assume this sale so would be an additional receipt. There would also be revenue savings from the council no longer operating services from the premises. In a full year these savings equate to £19.3k per annum. This potentially increases the savings arising from the Admin Accommodation Project by £627k over 25 years.  
There would also be savings arising from the council moving out of the Guildhall. The direct running costs at the Guildhall (National Non-Domestic Rates, energy etc) total approximately £100k. Further work regarding use and custodianship of the building needs to be undertaken to finalise the level of operational savings that could be made from relocating services to the new Headquarters.

### **Legal**

17. None.

### **Property**

18. All implications are included in this report, except that St Anthony's House is the location of a hub for the Council's dark fibre network which would be required to be relocated elsewhere.

### **Human Resources**

19. None

### **Risk Management**

20. There are no known risks with the recommendation.

**Recommendations**

21. That the status of the Guildhall and St Anthonys House in relation to the Administrative Accommodation Strategy is revised in line with this report.
22. That further work is progressed to develop future use and development options in relation to the Guildhall site in line with the finalised Conservation and Heritage Plan for the site, bearing in mind the requirement for continued use of the Council Chamber.
23. That work is undertaken to assess the requirements of the political groups in relation to space and accommodation needs in West Offices.
24. That the Director of City Strategy is authorised to commence initial discussions with third parties regarding possible property options to support the long term use, custodianship or ownership, viability and maintenance of both the Guildhall and St Anthonys House.

**Reason:** To manage the Council's property assets in an economic and efficient manner in line with corporate objectives.

**Contact Details**

**Author:**

**Roger Ranson  
Assistant Director  
Economy and Asset  
Management**

**Chief Officer Responsible for the  
report:**

**Bill Woolley  
Director of City Strategy**

**Cabinet Member  
Responsible for the  
Report:**

**Report  
Approved**



**Date** 23 December 2011

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)** *List information for all*

*Implication : Financial*

*Name Patrick Looker*

*Title Finance Manager*

*Tel No. 551633*

**Ward Affected:**

**Guildhall**

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**