

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

20 April 2010

Subject: Workplace Transformation Programme - Office Decant Proposals

Cabinet member: Councillor John Noeken – Resources

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

To explain options for decanting Wiltshire Council staff from Old County Hall, the MECH building and Browfort, Devizes during the refurbishment planned as part of the Workplace Transformation Programme. Officers have identified two main approaches to the relocation, each with advantages and disadvantages, namely;

- Two large phases of works (MECH building, followed by Old County Hall), requiring a high number of staff to be decanted.
- Multiple small phases of work, requiring smaller numbers of staff to be decanted to alternative accommodation.

Consideration of these options has identified significant advantages in decanting in two large phases, notably with regards to minimised disruption to staff, lower overall risks from building and ICT tasks, and the possibility of a more efficient, radical refurbishment programme. In light of this analysis Strategic Property Services have identified that the current George Ward site, in Melksham, which will become vacant in July 2010, would deliver the required capacity.

Proposals

- a. That Cabinet approves the proposal to provide decant accommodation at the existing George Ward School, Melksham, and authorise officers to develop these plans further, including the consultation on, and development of appropriate methods to minimise the impact on staff through this period.
- b. That Cabinet note that the governance and reporting line for this proposal is within the Workplace Transformation Programme, the Board of which will receive regular reports on progress and issues from the Programme Director.
- c. Cabinet are asked to provide an opinion on where they and the council's Chief Officers should be located during this period.

Reasons for Proposal

- 1) Cabinet has previously approved the Workplace Transformation Programme (WTP), and within it the refurbishment of County Hall and Browfort office buildings.
- 2) Preliminary work has established proposals for the most effective approach to the required decant of Staff from Old County Hall, MECH and Browfort, which will provide modern fit-for-purpose Staff accommodation during and following the works.
- 3) Whilst the proposed decant solution can be delivered within the overall budgetary provision delegated to the Programme Board, the impact of the proposal on staff and members is considered significant enough to request that Cabinet confirm their approval of the proposal.

Dr Carlton Brand
Director of Resources

Wiltshire Council

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Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

1. To propose an approach to decanting staff during refurbishment works at County Hall and Browfort related to the Workplace Transformation Programme.
2. To request Councillors' approval to proceed with the implementation of the proposal, taking note of the key areas of work involved.

Background

3. Cabinet has previously approved the Workplace Transformation Programme (WTP), and within it the refurbishment of County Hall and Browfort office buildings to provide modern, fit for purpose office accommodation for Council staff, allied to flexible working solutions. The authority to progress individual elements of the programme was delegated to the Workplace Transformation Programme Board who have identified an approach for decant.
4. The nature of the construction work to be undertaken on both County Hall and Browfort sites will be disruptive and take place over a long period of time. Both for staff wellbeing and operational delivery reasons it is not desirable to have staff remain within the Main Extension County Hall (MECH) during the rebuilding work, and hence the WTP finances included budgetary provision for decanting staff off-site during the works.
5. Preliminary work has since progressed to establish the most effective way in which to carry out the works to County Hall and Browfort. Whilst the proposed decant solution can be delivered within the overall budgetary provision delegated to the Programme Board, the impact of the proposal on staff and members is considered significant enough to request that Cabinet confirm their approval of the proposal.

Main Considerations for the Council

6. There are two main ways in which the refurbishment work to County Hall could be arranged:

- a. Two large phases of works (MECH building, followed by Old County Hall), requiring a high number of staff to be decanted;
- b. Multiple small phases of work, requiring smaller numbers of staff to be decanted to alternative accommodation.

7. The benefits of two large phases of work are considered to be significant:

- Health and safety risks inherent in carrying out work within an occupied building would be minimised – although some works in occupied buildings will be unavoidable at times, these can be tightly controlled and dealt with as exceptions
- The overall level of risk in the refurbishment programme would be significantly reduced, as individual areas of work to the buildings can be carried out consecutively, enabling contractors to carry out similar elements of work in a coherent programme, rather than in a more fragmented, piecemeal way
- The number of staff who would be disrupted by the actual works (eg. noise, vibration and dust) would be minimised;
- The requirement for out of hours building work would be reduced, as the need to plan disruptive work around staff working hours will be reduced, but not removed, leading to a more efficient building project operation
- The frequency of staff moves to fit around smaller phases of works will be reduced
- A far more holistic view of the buildings can be taken in designing solutions for the refurbishment – for example, a sustainable, low carbon non-air conditioned solution can be explored in the MECH building by introducing the ability to form penetrations through each floor which is only possible via a large scale decant programme
- Increased ability to provide early accommodation for partner organisations within plans
- Better strategic planning for ICT infrastructure to remain secure during the works
- Reduced ICT risk and workload pressure

8. On this basis, decant solutions that would enable this larger-phase approach, have been explored. Such an approach requires temporary accommodation to be available for a period of around two years from the end of 2010, and to provide approximately 600 workstations. This number of workstations, assuming a level of flexible working through staff and management behaviour, could accommodate up to 900 staff, and therefore enable the entire MECH building in Trowbridge to be vacated. This level of capacity would also provide decant space for staff from Browfort to enable a similar refurbishment approach to be taken there.

9. Strategic Property Services have reviewed the options for decant and have identified that the current George Ward site, in Melksham, which will become vacant in July 2010 when the school relocates to the new Melksham Oak Community School would deliver the required capacity. Other alternatives considered are covered in paragraph 22 below.

10. The following key points are relevant to the proposal to utilise George Ward for decant and the approach to delivering it:
 - a. The existing school buildings will be pragmatically refurbished to provide accommodation that is fit for use as offices, with specific adaptations for accessibility made as necessary.
 - b. All office space will include tea and coffee making facilities.
 - c. Accommodation used within the school will be developed on an open plan basis and there is adequate provision for a wide range of meeting room sizes.
 - d. A project manager from within the WTP team will be allocated to draw together the various strands necessary to ensure a successful occupation of the building and adherence to costs and deadlines;
 - e. An effective staff communication and consultation strategy will be required assuming Cabinet approval is granted. This will need to include extensive involvement with the Trade Union and the Staff Disability Forum. WTP staff events are planned in June to communicate further with staff on a range of issues, including decant.
 - f. Consultation with services to establish their location requirements for staff will be undertaken.
 - g. A transport strategy will be established to ensure staff access to the school site is maintained, and that those without cars are provided for, for instance a staff bus, serving a route linking Trowbridge, Melksham and Devizes could be provided.
 - h. HR will be involved in ensuring that existing policies in relation to staff relocation are followed.
 - i. A decision is required on whether specific groups of officers, such as corporate directors, should remain at County Hall throughout the project is required. Consequently, Members are asked to provide an opinion on where they and chief officers should be based throughout the duration of the works.
 - j. ICT equipment provided to staff when decanted to the school site will be new, and meet the WTP specification developed to maximise the uptake of flexible working. This equipment will then be relocated into the newly refurbished office accommodation on completion;
 - k. It is proposed that existing furniture will be relocated to the school site as part of the decant moves, but will be rationalised as far as possible to maximise the efficiency of the space provided.
 - l. The Facilities Management (FM) model to be applied will be in line with that being delivered in Bourne Hill, with a dedicated FM officer on site to respond to staff needs, with on-site security provided.
 - m. Planning consent will be required for a temporary change of use, and initial discussions with planning officers have taken place. Further work is now required to determine the detailed approach to developing a planning application. This approach will determine the planning constraints on the number of parking spaces provided on the site, which is not physically constrained. Possible traffic surveys and neighbour consultation may take place as part of the planning application process.

- n. The buildings in the poorest condition on the site, which are also surplus to the accommodation requirements, will be demolished to remove the potential for vandalism.
- o. An Economic Impact Assessment will be carried out by the Economy and Enterprise Team to enable the impact of relocating a large number of staff out of Trowbridge to be understood. The consequential benefit to Melksham should also be captured.
- p. The management of this decant solution would be a considerable draw on resources within existing WTP workstreams, and will be planned to minimise any overlap with Bourne Hill. Such an approach is only possible with one large decant site.
- q. The existing school canteen can be reutilised to provide canteen facilities for staff.
- r. Only one ICT connection to the site is required to be provided and managed.
- s. The decant into one location with large, flexible spaces provides the ability for services to restructure early in the WTP process, rather than react to being moved in smaller teams where flexibility may not be achievable.
- t. The site is not expected to offer customer-facing services – these would be based entirely from Bradley Road for the Western area. The provision of Customer Services during the refurbishment works at Browfort remains to be planned in detail, although early conversations with the Customer Access workstream lead have occurred.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

11. The impact on the environment of this proposal will be considered more fully in the coming stage of development. However, key areas of note are:
- Whilst a location in Melksham may cause some staff further travel, for others it may be closer to home.
 - The implementation of this proposal will encourage greater flexible working as a stepping stone to achieving the objectives of WTP, and this in itself is considered to reduce the Council's overall environmental impact.
 - Whilst the buildings at the George Ward are not particularly energy efficient, their occupation for decant purposes enables other retained Council buildings to be refurbished with energy efficiency in mind, which would not otherwise be the case. Where refurbishment works are undertaken at George Ward (including the building services), opportunities to improve energy efficiency will be considered.
 - The provision of a staff bus service, if decided appropriate, will bring with it an environmental impact, but may additionally provide an alternative form of transport to the car for many staff based in Trowbridge.
 - The complete decant from MECH will represent a significant reduction in the council's environmental impact which will go some way to offsetting the additional impact of the George Ward site.
 - The complete decant from MECH offers broader opportunities with regard to environmental and energy solutions than would otherwise be

possible, this should enable us to achieve a significant reduction in the building's carbon footprint and running costs.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

12. Early consultation with the Staff Disability Forum has enabled initial issues to be captured, and further work is planned with this group and Trade Unions to ensure that staff views are taken on board as far as possible. The George Ward site does provide a large amount of fully accessible floor space, and isolated works will seek to maximise accessibility. However, there will be areas of the building that will be occupied as offices that may remain inaccessible due to planning or cost constraints.
13. It will be necessary to undertake consultation with staff and the Trade Unions to develop and assess methods of minimising the impact on staff during the decant period.

Risk Assessment

14. The proposal is considered to significantly reduce the cost and programme risk of the individual refurbishment projects planned through WTP.
15. An outline risk review has been carried out on the decant project, and an ongoing risk register will be maintained, which will be summarised on the overall WTP risk register as appropriate.
16. The proposal is considered to minimise the impact of the refurbishment programme on service delivery and will maximise the opportunity for collocation with partners at the earliest possible date.

Financial Implications

16. The overall cost of the proposal is forecast to be £2.4m, and is covered within currently approved budgets. These budgets are held either within WTP or represent items such as demolition of buildings, which are considered to be works that enhance the value of the asset prior to sale.
17. This proposal is considered to offer the best overall balance between cost, service delivery opportunity and staff health and wellbeing on the basis of the comparison contained in Appendix A.
18. The Facilities Management costs associated with running the site are considered to be manageable within the savings available from the reduced costs running costs through this period of the existing accommodation at County Hall and Browfort.
19. The George Ward site already has outline planning consent for residential use, and the funds from the sale are largely earmarked to the construction of the replacement school.

20. However, in the current economic climate, it is considered likely that the site will realise a greater receipt when it is sold in two or three years' time, than it would now. This decant proposal therefore provides a financial benefit to the Council in due course, but also ensures that the site will not sit vacant for a long period of time with the associated risk of vandalism and other antisocial behaviour developing in the local area.

Legal Implications

21. None identified.

Options Considered

22. The alternative options considered are summarised at Appendix A.

DR Carlton Brand

Director of Resources

Report Author

Neil Ward

Corporate Building Manager

Tel No. 01225 713298

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None

Appendices

Appendix A - Decant Options for Workplace Transformation programme