

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Employment & Appeals Committee **DATE:** 10th July 2013

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PART I **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY – WORKS AT ST MARTIN’S PLACE

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to respond to matter raised by the Employment and Appeals Committee at its meeting on 6th June 2013.

2. Recommendations

Permit the Accommodation Board to continue with works at St Martin’s Place following satisfaction that members’ concerns have been adequately addressed.

3. Corporate Plan Priorities

- Develop new ways of working
- Develop a skilled and capable workforce
- Achieve value for money

4. Other Implications

(a) Financial

The financial implications of the Accommodation Strategy have been reported previously.

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no direct Human Rights Act implications arising from this report.

5. Accommodation and Flexible Working

5.1 The Employment and Appeals Committee considered a report at its meeting on 6th June 2013 about accommodation and flexible working, with particular reference to the work due to be carried out at St Martins Place (SMP). The report detailed actions and progress in relation to:

- Document scanning and secure accessible storage
- Developing suitable, flexible accommodation
- Developing community hubs with drop in and log on facilities
- Extending flexible working

- 5.2 An oral update was made to the Committee on the programme of work at SMP to refurbish/ replace the air conditioning, wiring and IT cabling, which would require the evacuation of staff from a floor of each wing of the building for a temporary period. This would go hand in hand with the overall work plan to redesign the layout of the accommodation at SMP with new office furniture to fit the current and future needs for the most appropriate location of staff in relation to their customers and optimise the use of space.
- 5.2 Having noted the report, the Committee considered that there were a number of questions which remained unanswered together with a number of matters on which further explanation and assurance was sought. These are addressed below:-

5.2.1 The original strategy of the Council on moving to SMP

The Freehold of St. Martins Place has always belonged to the Council. In April 1990 the land was let to Kestrel Properties for a term of 999 years. Kestrel built St. Martins Place. As part of the Lease agreement SBC was entitled to 38% of rental income from St. Martins Place.

The Lease was assigned/sold to Capital & Counties at some point.

SBC took Leases of 5 of the 6 floors in 2007 and then brought back the Leasehold interest from Capital and Counties in March 2009. This decision was taken as the council needed to relocate staff out of the Town Hall and was able to negotiate a good deal. It was anticipated that the council would occupy St Martins Place as their new head quarters for a short/medium term while the development of the Heart of Slough proceed, with a desire for the new offices to eventually be located with the Curve.

The Town Hall eventually closed in 2011 and all remaining staff were transferred to SMP and The Centre, Farnham Road.

Economic factors have now influenced changes to the council's accommodation strategy, resulting in the council's decision to remain at SMP for the next 7-10 years. Therefore the council needs to invest capital to enhance the buildings standard to ensure compliance with Health & Safety regulations, respond to service changes and upgrade/replace the aged mechanical and electrical equipment at SMP, which parts are unobtainable to maintain operations and respond to break downs.

The decision to invest in furniture to better utilise space and re-do layouts to respond to service changes, should be undertaken in line with the mechanical & electrical upgrade as offices will need to be completely decanted to carry out these essential works. Therefore rather than review furniture in the future, it makes financial sense to implement changes in line with this project. It is also anticipated that due to the age of the existing furniture, it is unlikely to remain intact after further moves.

5.2.2 Health and Safety space standards and how the proposed new desks/seating arrangements comply

New proposed layouts are being put together in conjunction with all services, assessing their future accommodation requirements and therefore space planning is being based around their service needs.

The Facilities & Corporate Services Manager is working closely with Building Control and Health & Safety Officers to ensure that all layouts are constructed in compliance with Health & Safety and Building Regulations. She will also be initiating a Fire Strategy which will ensure that an up to date Fire Risk Assessment of the building is carried out and that the Buildings Fire Evacuation Procedure reflect building layout changes and therefore advice staff accordingly. Training and briefings will also be held for staff, so they understand any changes to the existing procedures.

The proposed layouts provide one person between 10 – 14 cubic square metres, depending on location. These measurements have been forwarded to Health & Safety Officers, along with proposed layout and no issues have been raised. If the council wishes to increase this measurement, there is flexibility to do so by removing desks which have been allocated for desk sharing. Future Space allocation per person will give officers the same and in some areas more distance between desks.

5.2.3 Age of existing desks and cost of replacement

The existing furniture is 10+ years old. It was originally purchased to accommodate the traditional wide visual display units. Since, technology has developed and therefore we are using slimmer and smaller PCs requiring less desk space. Therefore we can now better utilise our office space by investing in more modern and effective furniture.

Cost of replacing furniture at SMP will be about £360,000 over a 2 year period.

5.2.4 Desks & additional Facilities Details

IMPROVMENTS / ADDITIONAL	BENEFITS
14 more meeting rooms	Easier to hold meetings/1 to 1s. Free up canteen space.
6 more meeting rooms for Social Services Clients and Staff	Reduce requirement to discuss issues in reception or open office space. Also enable staff supervisions to be done more easily.
18 Break Out Areas	More space for confidential calls/working as well as a quick chat with a member of staff.
About 78 extra desks Present Number of Desks – 794 Future Number of Desk - 872	78 more than at present throughout the building (enabled more desk sharing).
About 86 Flexible Working/Desk Sharing	Enable more flexible working.
Quiet Working/ELearning Suite/Annual Elections	Booths for staff to work away from their desk to undertake online training or just work away from the open office.
Improved Shower Facility	Enhance DDA compliance, encourage staff to cycle and walk to Work
Enhance Reception Facilities	Security of the building and reception staff

5.2.5 Impact of change/moving on staff and measures to deal with stress/issues

It is anticipated that this project will have a positive effect on staff as we are responding to staff feedback with the following benefits:-

- Increase Fresh Air Capacity & enhance Climate Control, while also meeting requirements of new layouts. This will provide staff with a better working environment which provides suitable temperature control.
- Provide staff with more private meeting space, which is in great demand especially for our social services staff.
- Enhance building and staff security by redesigning the reception area, while also providing better meeting/waiting facilities for customers who may be visiting the council offices to address sensitive matters.
- Create more flexible working opportunities for our staff so that their time is used more effectively and therefore increase productivity. Also improve staff morale, commitment & motivation by offering different flexible working options, while also responding to their feedback.

Staff will be kept fully informed throughout the process via briefings and electronic information. An electronic notice board has already been set up and will be developed where staff FAQs can be posted. Facilities Management will also work closely with Communications in ensuring regular updates are circulated to staff. Staff will be given the opportunity to post anonymous questions and as with previous phases, Facilities Management will continue to offer presence at staff team meetings to address any issues/concerns.

The drafted proposed layouts have already taken into account feedback received from officers.

Once the project commences, the board will work with the HR team to agree any further facilities that can be offered to staff to address stress, including the employee counselling service which is already available.

5.2.6 Total cost of the works at SMP, Business case and Alternatives

The Business Case for this project has gone to the Capital Asset Management Board. To date it is anticipated that the following capital investment will be required over a 2 year period:-

Furniture – About £360,000 to upgrade SMP Furniture

Building Works –TBC, Plans being finalised

Mechanical & Electrical Upgrade - £1.2 Million

IT Infrastructure Upgrade Costs - £500,000

Archive - £350,000

DIP - £150,000

5.2.6.1 Options Considered and Impact

- **Do Nothing** – Increasing staff complaints due to restrictions on service delivery and office environment temperatures. Risk of SMP emergency closure if boilers or chillers fail. Continue with poor practices preventing staff from maintaining regular confidential one to one meetings, especially Social Services staff who are all required to have regular supervision meetings.
- **Retain Existing furniture** – Ineffective use of space, ongoing maintenance costs due to age of existing furniture (10+ years), especially where manoeuvring of furniture is required. Unable to build additional meeting rooms, confidential working space, enhance desk sharing etc.
- **Relocate Offices** – Costly as building will be leased not owned. This option will take time to explore and implement, by which time the SMP mechanical and electrical may fail and parts be unobtainable. Furniture costs would still be required.
- **LMP – Continue to under utilise site** – Inefficient use of public money. Early termination = very high costs for council including dilapidation costs. Lease until May 2020.

6. Conclusion

The board believes that this report responds to matters raised by the Committee and provides suitable justification for proceeding with this project.