



**REPORT of  
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

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**to  
COUNCIL  
31 MARCH 2022**

**COMMERCIAL OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL OFFICES, PRINCES ROAD, MALDON**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To update Members on exploratory work regarding options for the Council Offices, Princes Road, Maldon and seek support for a feasibility study to be completed and reported back to the Council later in the 2022 / 23 financial year.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) That support be given to a feasibility study and associated work to further explore the options for a new office and potential development of the Princes Road site utilising One Public Estate funding, at no cost to the authority.
- (ii) That the Corporate Projects Working Group will have oversight of this project with a feasibility study coming back to the Council later in the 2022 / 23 financial year.

**3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES**

**3.1 Introduction**

- 3.1.1 The Covid pandemic has accelerated the move to agile working as set out in the transformation blueprint and has changed the way we use the Council office. The majority of staff are now working in an agile way with the office being used for monthly team meetings, training and development, essential face to face appointments and democratic functions. A limited number of business-critical staff have a full-time presence in the office, including the Community Engagement, General Office and Facilities teams.
- 3.1.2 The Commercial Options Project team has been working with Essex Housing and the Corporate Projects Working Group since October 2021 to assess options for the site at Princes Road. The Corporate Projects Working Group attended two workshops in November and December 2021 to review the feasibility of these options based on high-level estimated costs. Members have received a presentation and had the option to attend a briefing.
- 3.1.3 Essex Housing will support Maldon District Council to coordinate this work as the One Public Estate lead for Essex. Further expertise will be drawn into the project as required (e.g. valuations, specialist surveys, cost consultants).

## 3.2 Issues

- 3.2.1 Agile working (introduced as part of the transformation programme) has enabled a significant reduction in the number of staff working in the office, so the building is under occupied. This presents an opportunity to review the best use of Council assets.
- 3.2.2 The existing Council building is not compliant with the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.2.3 Annual running and maintenance costs are higher than the current income received from partners largely due to the age of the building.
- 3.2.4 There is limited potential to rent additional office space with the national shift to hybrid working, and also with the current office layout and inaccessibility issues.
- 3.2.5 It will cost circa £4 million to refurbish the office, but this cost will be significantly higher if we want a fully accessible building.
- 3.2.6 By 1 April 2030, all commercial rented buildings must have improved the building to an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ≥B or register a valid exemption. These changes are a precursor to reaching net zero emissions by 2050 as set out in the Government energy white paper.
- 3.2.7 The existing building is below an EPC B rating and does not achieve Maldon District Council's Climate Action Plan targets, nor will it meet net zero emissions targets by 2050.
- 3.2.8 Do nothing does not provide best value or longer-term financial stability or meet our Climate Action Plan targets.

## 4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 It is recommended that the options for building a new council office and developing the site at Princes Road are taken forward to a feasibility review based on the financial, environmental and social benefits outlined in the presentation.

## 5. IMPACT ON STRATEGIC THEMES

- 5.1 This project supports a number of Corporate Plan priorities and strategic theme objectives in relation to Place and Community. The Princes Road site has been put forward as part of the Five-Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS) call for sites and would potentially assist the authority in achieving its targets for affordable housing in the District.

## 6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – This is dependent on the office location, but the way services are accessed forms part of a separate 'Customer Service Strategy' which is out of scope of this project (although the requirements will feed-in to the Commercial Options Project as one of our key stakeholders).

- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – This is improved if we continue to support flexible working for staff with more inclusive recruitment but can offer a fully accessible office for staff and members to use when they want to.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – There is significant risk throughout this project due to the potential demolition of the building, development of the site and fluctuation in building materials and house prices. Greater risk is introduced if we continue to have partners on-site. All risks will be recorded and tracked as part of the project governance, with regular reporting back to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and members.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – This project will require funding through the various stages, although the feasibility review is being funded through the initial One Public Estate grant of £80k, and there is the possibility of further funding through this scheme. It is also possible that if we build 100% affordable homes on the site, the costs could be met in full through commuted sums, although this option needs to be investigated through the feasibility review.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – The project will need a dedicated project manager with support from staff across Resources, Strategy, Performance and Governance (SPG) and Service Delivery. A Working Group has already been established with key stakeholders identified.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – If the project outcomes are achieved, there will be a positive impact on the surrounding area and environment through reduced car usage, greener housing and a zero net carbon Council office.
- (vii) **Impact on Strengthening Communities** – If we can provide additional affordable housing, some of it designed to be accessible, this will help meet the needs of residents on low incomes or with mobility issues. The new Council office could have partners on-site, delivering shared services as part of a 'Customer Hub' that deliver essential services under one roof.

Background Papers: None.

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