



**REPORT of
DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**to
COUNCIL
13 FEBRUARY 2025**

COUNCIL OFFICES PRINCES ROAD

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To confirm the location of the Council's offices for Maldon District Council (MDC) in the immediate term so that key dependencies can be progressed.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- (i) That Maldon District Council will continue to operate from the Council Offices at Princes Road;
- (ii) That Maldon District Council will not be seeking to develop another site or relocate the Council to another office building for the immediate term;
- (iii) That the Council approves the principle of 2025 spend from reserves with the purpose of ensuring urgent maintenance items are progressed - details of any spend will follow normal approval processes as specified;
- (iv) That the Council approves the principle of progressing with Net Zero feasibility and for officers to secure relevant funding to support this activity;
- (v) That the Council approves the principle of progressing further work with regard to making improvements to the offices to ensure they remain fit for purpose for Members, Officers and the Council's tenants, and to spending from reserves (via the appropriate governance route) should it be agreed that these should be implemented.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The location of the Council's offices and the viability of the Council building at Princes Road has been debated for some time – most recently in 2023 when the latest Feasibility Study was concluded.
- 3.2 At that point, the Council's intention was to relocate from Princes Road entirely and the feasibility study's purpose was to seek appropriate options for the Council to consider. However, in 2023 when the initial findings were presented, the Council determined that (alongside investigating the two recommended options Princes Road Depot and the offices at Promenade Park) its preference was to also revisit the possibility of remaining at Princes Road and to refurbish instead.
- 3.3 Unfortunately, this change in direction had implications for the Council's One Public Estate (OPE) funding - secured on the basis that the Council intended to sell the Princes Road site in its entirety and relocate. As a consequence, it was agreed that

the remainder of the Council's feasibility grant would be returned to OPE until a firm decision had been reached; and the project was paused whilst the Commercial team focused on establishing the Councils Asset Management Strategy (required to set out the Councils intentions when residing/occupying premises with Partners).

- 3.4 Since this time, a number of other initiatives have reached a stage where critical decisions are needed to be able to move forward. These are building maintenance and repair, Net Zero infrastructure investment and office refit / refurbishment.
- **Building Maintenance and Repair:**
For some time, significant investment in the building has been mitigated due to the intention that relocation or refurbishment would be imminent. This has resulted in a significant build-up of maintenance requirements. It is envisaged that some of this work could be brought forward as part of the building decarbonisation (net zero) works, but there are also some urgent maintenance needed for the coming financial year. Officers are currently working on a proposal which aims to address these urgent items in 2025, whilst a plan for longer term changes (which can also make a contribution to our Net Zero targets) is developed. 2025 costs are expected to be up to c.£400k. A detailed programme of works will be developed and brought to members for approval.
 - **Net Zero Infrastructure Investment:**
The Council's Net Zero deadline has been agreed for 2050, however it is accepted that significant infrastructure changes will be needed across the district to achieve this. The building has been assessed and the Council has been advised that c.£1.8M changes could be made to reduce the offices carbon footprint. Officers propose that the Council takes time to consider these options more fully and phase the changes to ensure investment is made wisely - achieving our net zero objectives as well as ensuring a comfortable and efficient building. It is intended that MDC takes advantage of grants and external Net Zero resources available to assist us with this e.g. Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund. Lead times associated with securing funding can be long and therefore applications should be made asap in 2025.
 - **Office refit/refurbishment:**
Finally, the Council Chamber is not fit for purpose and requires a refit. As the offices will likely continue to be used for local authority Committee meetings and Officer desk space beyond May 2026, consideration needs to be made as to the extent of renovation made. The offices have been multi-tenanted for some time but there is also potentially more leasable space to be realised within the building with more efficient use of space. Investment to reconfigure the chamber and provide flexible office / meeting space has been estimated at c.£900k+ but work will need to be done to revisit this proposal with Members and senior Officers to ensure any changes meet the Councils immediate need, as well as any future arrangements.
- 3.5 As MDC is one of many District Councils in consideration for change under the Governments recently announced Local Government Reorganisation, the future of the Council, the building and its continued use under a unified Local Authority is presently unclear.
- 3.6 As a result, Officers advise that the Council confirms its intention to remain at Princes Road for the foreseeable and cease any further work with regards to relocating. This will enable the following:

- Urgent building repair / maintenance items to be agreed / actioned.
 - Building decarbonisation / efficiency options - contributing to our districts wider Net Zero targets - to be explored/implemented.
 - Refurbishment / refit changes to be considered.
- 3.7 Members will be consulted / provide steer on these three factors via the Net Zero Working Group and the Strategic Assets Working Group respectively. Any relevant decisions will then be escalated via the usual governance route.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 With Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation announcements made at the end of 2024, decisions on how local authority will operate within Maldon District and Essex County beyond May 2028 are yet to be decided. This also means the future of the building and its role within local authority is also unclear.
- 4.2 Therefore, it is recommended that the Council confirms its intention to remain in Princes Road Council Office building in the immediate term. This will enable critical operational and strategic decisions to be made regarding our Net Zero, Repair and Maintenance and Refurbishment ambitions and for these to be appropriately delivered whilst wider decisions are made.

5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

5.1 Investing in our District

- 5.1.1 Retaining and maintaining the Council offices ensures that the public owned asset remains fit for purpose and able to provide the Council services that our community depend upon.

5.2 Protecting our environment

- 5.2.1 Decarbonising the Council offices will be a priority for the Council in line with its Net Zero ambitions.

5.3 Delivering good quality services.

- 5.3.1 Ensuring the Council offices remain fit for purpose will support Officers and Members in delivering the services required by our District.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – None.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – None.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – None.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – Whilst there are no immediate financial impacts directly linked with this decision, remaining in the building will mean that costs associated with refurbishing and decarbonising the building – along with the backlog of maintenance items- will need to be brought to Members

for consideration and determination. These will be raised via the normal Member approval process in due course, as highlighted in the report. Whilst it is anticipated that some costs will be significant, Officers intend to mitigate this where possible by utilising Net Zero grant funding where this is available to us.

(v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None.

Background Papers: None.

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