



Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority

Meeting and date: Executive Committee – 13 September 2023

Report title: Unit 7 Exit Programme

Lead Member: Councillor Matthew Walsh

Report sponsor: Mark Hemming, Director Finance and Assets

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Action: Decision

Recommendations:

That the Committee approve to serve notice to allow the exit of Unit 7 on 30 September 2024, and undertake the necessary enabling works as detailed in the Appendices.

Executive summary:

This paper is being presented to seek approval to exit from the building to the rear of the Headquarters building on Stocklake, Aylesbury and to undertake the enabling works required to facilitate this exit. Commonly known as 'Unit 7', this building is located on Garside Way and is the only building currently leased by the Service. There is, therefore, an opportunity to make savings through the release of this building from the property portfolio.

As a result of recent discussions with the landlord of the building, it has now been agreed that providing at least 9 months' notice is given at the end of any calendar month, the Service can leave Unit 7 in any month after that.

The Service has received notification that the national Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capability is under review and the grant funding currently received to pay for the function will cease in March 2025, therefore alternate arrangements for accommodating the USAR functionality will need to be considered.

This programme has been exploring the different options available to the Service to exit Unit 7 and find locations for all departments currently located within and generate savings whilst doing so.

Financial implications:

Indicative one-off costs of £369k have been identified to cover all elements of the Programme based on industry standards, expert input, and professional judgement.

A provisional sum of £500k for enabling works had already been included in the capital programme for 2023-24.

Costs identified are largely implementation at this stage and a minimal ongoing cost of £5k per year has been identified.

Dilapidation costs have been estimated at circa £232k (plus professional fees). This cost has not been included in the one-off costs noted above as they are already accounted for in the approved capital programme.

The current annual running costs for the Unit 7 building are circa £178k and these could be released from September 2024 (less the £5k ongoing costs noted above).

The payback period on the one-off costs is just over two years excluding dilapidation costs, or under three and a half years if dilapidation costs are included.

Risk management:

A risks and issues register is being developed and will be informed by the degradation work. Key risks for this programme will be resource and supplier availability, cost, timescale available to exit Unit 7, and the people impact.

The Programme will run in accordance with the agreed internal project management processes, with regular updates to the Business Transformation Board (BTB), Strategic Management Board (SMB), and the Executive Committee. It is proposed that the work necessary to successfully deliver the Programme would be complete by 30 September 2024.

Legal implications:

In March 2017, this lease for Unit 7 was re-negotiated to provide the Fire Authority with more flexible exit options following the opening of the blue light hub. For a relatively minor increase in the annual rent, the Authority was able to agree new break clauses at the end of December 2019, 2020, and 2021.

The original lease break clause at the end of 2022 also remained, with the full-term expiring 24 December 2027. A further deed of variation was subsequently signed adding break clauses at the end of 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026 (with no increase in annual rent). Since then, further discussion has resulted in an agreement that providing at least 9 months' notice is given, the Service can leave Unit 7 in any month after that.

Privacy and security implications:

No privacy and security implications have been identified at this stage.

Duty to collaborate:

The programme will impact the BFRS estate and personnel only, therefore is not considered to be suitable for inclusion within the collaboration agenda. There has been dialogue with representatives of Buckinghamshire Council regarding the adoption of hybrid working following the Covid-19 pandemic with the sharing of examples of good practice, however, this could not extend to the possibility of exploring shared sites with them as they too have been streamlining their estate

requirements. The Service will continue to investigate utilising our own sites by sharing with other emergency services along the lines of the arrangements at Newport Pagnell and Princes Risborough.

Health and safety implications:

As some of the proposals involve changes to the current estate, there are health and safety considerations. Early discussions have taken place with the incoming Health and Safety Manager, and they have been identified as a key stakeholder within the Programme Team to ensure compliance with legislative and health and safety requirements.

Environmental implications:

Unit 7 is forecast to utilise approximately 112,000 KWh of electricity during 2023-24, which on a standard electricity contract would equate to 24 tonnes of CO2. Although the latter figure is currently reduced to zero by virtue of the Service's contract for 100% renewable electricity, the reduction in energy consumption will certainly have a positive environmental impact.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion implications:

The Programme supports the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Objectives under the heading:

Facilities and Welfare Provision - Focus on ensuring our current employees have the correct workplace arrangements they need to carry out their role effectively.

- *Continue to engage with employees to identify needs regarding uniform, facilities, and welfare provisions.*
- *Design and adapt our buildings, as we continue our capital development programme.*

A comprehensive stakeholder and communications plan will be developed as part of the Programme process to enable us to identify any specific needs that will need to be addressed. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and can be seen at Appendix 3.

Consultation and communication:

All department heads within the Unit 7 and HQ buildings have been consulted with to ascertain their current ways of working, any current issues they may have and their future requirements for any potential change to their working environment. This has resulted in a great deal of information being collated in the form of a Statement of Business Requirements and used to inform the work of a space planning consultant to advise on maximising the use of the facilities available to us.

A Programme Mandate has been approved at earlier BTB and SMB meetings where comments were again captured and used to inform the Business Case.

Formal consultation will take place where necessary.

Staff engagement will take place throughout the Programme and updates will be provided as part of the regular reporting mechanisms identified earlier in this paper.

Background papers:

[Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority – Property Strategy 2018-2025](#)

Appendix	Title	Protective Marking
1	Project Business Case - Unit 7 Programme	None
2	High Level Delivery Timeline	None
3	Equality Impact Assessment	None