

Report For:	<b>SHADOW EXECUTIVE</b>
Meeting Date:	<b>20 August</b>

## SUMMARY

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>UNITARY ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY</b>
Responsible Officer:	John Reed
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<b>Recommendation:</b>	<p>Members are requested to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree that the new Unitary Council will have a countywide footprint for both Members and Staff, and that the emerging policy will enable the flexibility to work in any of the new council's offices across the County.</li> <li>2. Agree to a two phase office accommodation strategy as set out in this report to include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) A first phase to take the necessary steps to implement the proposed small Unitary Headquarters at the Gateway, Aylesbury on an interim basis.</li> <li>b) A second phase to take the necessary steps to enable the transformation work for the office accommodation strategy post vesting day.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Delegate to the Shadow interim S151 Officer authority to make necessary appointments of consultants and contractors to facilitate the work to progress the strategy and implementation, provided that costs fall within the budget envelope set out in this report.</li> </ol>
Legal & Finance:	<p>If Members are in agreement with the proposed recommendations, the detailed proposal will be developed. A preliminary budget has been included in the transition budget for the transition accommodation strategy of £700k.</p> <p>There are not considered to be any legal implications to the adoption of the interim Corporate Headquarters. There are practical issues and these will be considered as part of the further work being undertaken.</p>
Options:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do nothing – This is not considered an option. The Unitary will need to establish a new Accommodation Strategy due to substantial overlaps in business activity and the requirement to achieve efficiency savings in the</li> </ol>

	<p>Corporate Estate.</p> <p>2. Consider an alternative arrangement. It is considered that either the Gateway or the County Council offices would be able to accommodate the interim headquarters to enable the New Council to operate effectively and would reduce the requirement for substantial alterations elsewhere.</p> <p>3. Agree the Gateway as the proposed base for a small corporate Headquarters on an interim basis whilst the overarching longer term Office Accommodation strategy is agreed. <b>THIS IS THE RECOMMENDED OPTION.</b></p>
Reason: (Executive only)	The proposed approach supports the development of a short and longer term office accommodation strategy for Buckinghamshire Council.

## Executive Summary

The purpose of the report is to seek a view from Shadow Executive on the proposed approach to the development of a short and longer term office accommodation strategy for the new Unitary Council to support service delivery and the democratic process both in transition and transformation.

## Content of Report

### Background

1. Together, the five councils in Buckinghamshire hold a range of properties which are central to the current delivery of council services. In the longer term, as the unitary council develops its future models of service delivery through the transformation programme, there will be a need for a fundamental review of the property estate to ensure it is fit for purpose. There may be opportunities to rationalise properties, in line with the principles of the One Public Estate programme, and to contribute to the new council's objectives in relation to income generation, regeneration, asset optimisation etc.
2. An immediate issue to consider is around office accommodation. The longer term accommodation needs are to be considered as part of the future transformation programme for the new council. However, there are some key issues around our office accommodation arrangements during the transitional phase which we need to determine now so that property teams can plan effectively for Vesting Day. These include the approach to office move requirements, the location of the senior management team, and member accommodation.

This paper proposes a two phase approach to office accommodation planning.

### **Phase 1- Interim Office Accommodation 2020-2022**

3. A key principle for Vesting Day is that the vast majority of staff will continue to be based at their existing place of work, with the flexibility to access other buildings and planning is taking place on that basis. However, it is recognised that there is likely to be an ambition for some teams to be relocated to different locations at an early stage. Therefore, there will need to be clear overall governance put in place to manage the aspirations some teams may have to ensure that resources are directed in a co-ordinated way to address any key changes in staff accommodation including a potential base for the corporate management team and elected Members. There will also be a need for identified flexible working spaces in all existing offices with appropriate IT provision.
4. Whilst we need to take decisions on these issues to plan for Vesting Day and beyond, it is important not to undermine the ability of the new council to take a more fundamental, longer term view about its options linked to transformation. It is therefore proposed that an interim high level office accommodation strategy is developed for the period 2020-2022. This will provide some certainty to the property teams in planning for the initial months of the new Council, whilst also providing a period whereby the new Council can develop its longer term strategy.
5. This strategy will set out an approach to:
  - Member and senior management accommodation
  - Approach to office move/co-location requests
  - Access control systems
  - Flexible working spaces

### ***Principles***

6. It is proposed an interim office accommodation strategy is based on the following principles:
  - At the point of go live:
    - All existing office buildings will continue to serve their current purpose during this period.
    - Office move proposals will be prioritised according to business need.
    - The presumption will be that office accommodations requirements will initially be met through use of existing council buildings so that the new council can minimise external spend (subject to interface with regeneration

projects). The presumption is also that the current configurations will be adopted as much as possible to keep moving of walls and associated fitting out work to a minimum.

- Officers in the senior management team and elected members will be able to work flexibly between sites, and drop in facilities and parking will be available for use in each location.
- Single access control system to offices and car park would be preferable if affordable (BCC, SBDC, CDC all use same supplier already and overall proximity readers are in place at each council)
- An interim solution should be identified to provide an office base for:
  - Executive Members.
  - The Council's senior management team (tiers 1-3) recognising that some tier 3 in particular may spend substantial amounts of operational time with their direct teams and reports.
  - A Council chamber for Council Executive and Committee meetings to support 147 Members (including voting equipment)

### ***Senior Management Team and Member Accommodation - Interim Solution 2020-2022***

7. A key principle of the proposed strategy is that officers in the senior management team and elected members will work flexibly between sites across the county. It will be particularly important from the outset that both elected members and the leadership team are visible to staff in different locations on a regular basis, and drop in facilities should be provided to achieve this.
8. It will also be important to establish a single location where the senior leadership team and Executive Members have a joint office base where they can work together.
9. Based on the availability of suitable accommodation across the current estate to meet these requirements, and the central location within the County, it is proposed the senior management team, Council Chamber and Executive Member accommodation should be located in Aylesbury as the most central point of the County and the County Town. On this basis, options include County Hall or the Gateway.
10. Either would be able to accommodate the requirements identified above. However, it is recommended that the preferred option should be the Gateway for the following reasons:
  - Important symbol of change
  - Modern, fit for purpose accommodation
  - Good availability of parking

- Potential for accommodating the council chamber with minimal costs (a council chamber could be developed at County Hall in the former Study Centre but this would require a level of investment which would be more appropriate for a longer term option).

11. The longer term plans for car parking at the Gateway have been considered. Currently, there are a total of 439 spaces between the main car park and the overflow car park. Approximately 139 of the spaces are in the ownership of Aylesbury Vale Estates (AVE) and are held under determinable licence. Whilst the remaining 300 spaces may well be sufficient for the Gateway (even with 147 members attending Council meetings), there will be opportunities to review the car parking strategy over the next 12 months and take action if further spaces are required. The Gateway is a functioning conference centre as well which generates income and there may be some conflicts if it is more intensively used as a Unitary, this is difficult to quantify at the current time. However, it is unlikely that the number of Member meetings held at the Gateway would exceed the current use by AVDC, given that some committee meetings would take place in other parts of the county (eg planning and licencing meetings etc).
12. If this option is agreed in principle, the next step would be to undertake a more detailed assessment of the potential use of the Gateway for senior management and member accommodation, including the implications for the existing use of the building. There is currently some vacant space within the Gateway which could potentially meet most of the requirements identified above without disruption to existing teams. The logical place for this work to sit is within the Property & Assets work stream.

### ***Service Accommodation***

13. As recognised above, a unitary council on this scale will need to have the ability to run its services from various bases across the county. Where possible, we should begin to develop this model of operating from the outset. A new flexible and mobile working policy will need to be developed before 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020
14. A number of office moves have been in discussion for some time, driven by existing business needs. These are now being reviewed in the context of the unitary decision.
15. We also need to understand which, if any, services are considering co-location for Vesting Day and whether there are any other business critical moves required during transition so that the property and assets work stream can develop a co-ordinated work plan.
16. There will be HR/OD and communication considerations around the developing policy. This will include a review of the car parking arrangements for Members, Senior Management and staff.

### ***Flexible Working Drop in Spaces***

17. There will be a significant need for officers to be able to work flexibly across different office locations around the county. The Resources work programme has identified the need to ensure that staff can access buildings, use IT equipment etc. to support this. In addition, it is proposed that dedicated office spaces are identified and promoted for flexible working in each office location for Vesting Day for both Members and officers.

### **Phase 2 – Long Term Office Accommodation Strategy 2022 and beyond**

18. During the first year of the new council, it is proposed that a longer term office accommodation strategy should be developed. This piece of work will require a fundamental review of existing ways of working and accommodation, together with significant engagement with stakeholders. It will need to be developed in a way that is aligned with the emerging service delivery model, the development of the council's vision, values and behaviours, and the council's broader objectives, for example in relation to its regeneration ambitions. It is envisaged that specialist accommodation consultants will need to be engaged to work with the council in developing this strategy.

### **Resourcing requirements**

19. This paper seeks initial authority on the proposed strategy. Subject to views, the proposals will be developed in more detail and costed.

### **Corporate Implications**

20. The Corporate implications are set out in the paper, together with financial and legal implications.

### **Consultation**

21. The report seeks authority to undertake further feasibility work. Further consultation will occur as part of that process.

## **Next Steps**

22. The next steps are;

- Form and brief the Consultants and internal team undertaking this work.
- Produce final programme, cost and delivery plan.
- Engagement with relevant Boards to develop the supporting work around the plan.
- Finalise plan in consultation with Members.

## **Background Papers**

None