

**Employment & Appeals Committee – Meeting held on Wednesday, 10th July, 2013.**

**Present:-** Councillors Rasib (Chair), Plenty (Vice-Chair), Brooker, Chohan, Coad, Davis, A S Dhaliwal and Sharif

**Also present under Rule 30:-** Councillors

**Apologies for Absence:-** Councillor S K Dhaliwal

**PART 1**

**13. Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

**14. Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th June 2013**

**Resolved** – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2013 be approved as a correct record.

However, Members commented that minute 6 (Accommodation and Flexible Working) did not reflect the strength of feeling at the Committee regarding the absence of the Director of Customer and Community Services at the meeting which had prevented full and proper consideration of the item.

**15. Accommodation Strategy - Works at St Martin's Place**

The Committee considered a report about the Accommodation Strategy introduced by Roger Parkin, Director of Customer and Community Services, assisted by Charan Dhillon and Mo Hassan.

The Committee received a presentation about the history, background and proposals for the Council's accommodation requirements for the next 7 – 10 years, with particular reference to the improvements and alteration planned at St Martin's Place (SMP), and received answers to questions as the presentation proceeded. The Accommodation Strategy had been designed to assist in rejuvenating the town centre by moving key services there, making them more accessible, and bringing additional footfall in the town centre every day. Housing staff were due to relocate from The Centre to Landmark Place (LMP) which would make better use of the accommodation there, as well as securing financial advantages. Freeing up the building at The Centre would open up options for future provision of Leisure Services by the Council through consideration of the best use of the Farnham Road and Montem sites.

The Committee was reminded that SMP had originally been regarded as a short / medium term location while the Council looked to move into the Town Centre. Economic factors had since ruled out any early possibility of this.

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Vacation of the Town Hall had led to occupation of SMP following minimal conversion work and given the need to continue to occupy it, the now more urgent need upgrade to meet the changing needs of the Council, it was necessary to invest capital to improve the standard of accommodation at SMP.

The improvements would enable a better utilisation of space through provision of modern, low maintenance office furniture including ergonomically effective chairs. Existing furniture was coming to the end of its useful life and would be recycled to charities and voluntary bodies. With further use of document image processing (DIP), and off-site archiving to reduce file cabinet storage, it was proposed to provide about 78 extra desks, 14 more meeting rooms, 6 more meeting rooms for Social Services clients, 18 breakout areas, quiet working space for e-learning etc, improved Reception and improved shower facilities.

Consultations were ongoing with Directors and Assistant Directors over the new office layouts, which would all be designed in line with Building Control and Health and Safety compliance and advice. The future space allocation would be 10 – 14 cubic metres per person, equal or better than as at present. There would be additional provision for hot desks / “docking stations” for visiting staff (together with “touch-down” facilities at other venues across the Borough (eg. Chalvey Community Centre). This would go hand in hand with IT upgrades of systems and infrastructure, provision of wi-fi and Local Area Networks (LAN) and extension of the arrangements for customers to self-serve and transact online.

A significant element of the work proposed was the mechanical and electrical upgrade. The existing heating /air conditioning system was not only inefficient but in danger of breakdown which could necessitate vacation of the building. A specification for the work was in the course of being drawn up in order to invite tenders. It was unlikely that the work would start until October 2013, when a complete floor of one wing at SMP would relocate to The Centre. The works will then continue to be carried out a wing at a time, with teams moving to the completed floor temporarily whilst their area was being refurbished. In addition to providing increased fresh air capacity and enhanced climate control, the new system would realise savings in electrical costs and gas consumption as well reduced maintenance call out costs.

The Committee noted that provision had been made in the capital programme to cover the cost of the works, which were estimated as follows:

- Upgrade of SMP furniture - £360,000
- Upgrade of LMP furniture and front of house works - £80,000
- Mechanical and electrical upgrade - £1,200,000
- Building works - to be confirmed
- IT infrastructure upgrade costs - £500,000

There were also archiving and DIP costs of £350,000 and £150,000 respectively.

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All other options considered for the Council's accommodation had a number of disadvantages and were not sustainable for the medium term. As an illustration of the financial benefits of undertaking the work, before and after rental and capital values for SMP were provided.

### **Resolved –**

- (a) That the Director of Customer and Community Services be thanked for his presentation and explanations for the Committee.
- (b) That the Accommodation Board be permitted to continue with works at SMP following satisfaction that members' concerns had been adequately addressed.

## **16. Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting be confirmed as 12th September 2013.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.20 pm)