

## **EXECUTIVE – MINUTES EXTRACT**

Tuesday 3 September 2024

### Present:

Councillor Bialyk (Chair)  
Councillors Wright, Allcock, Asvachin, Vizard, Williams, R and Wood

### Also present as opposition group Leaders:

Councillors Jobson, Moore and M. Mitchell

### Apologies:

Councillor Foale

### Also present:

Chief Executive, Strategic Director for Place, Strategic Director for Corporate Resources, Strategic Director for People, Interim Director Community Services (SL), Head of Service - Legal and Democratic Services & Acting Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services Manager

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### **RELOCATION OF COUNCIL SERVICES BASED IN THE CIVIC CENTRE**

The Executive received the report which sought approval to enable officer to proceed to the next stage of planning for a potential move of the Council services currently based at the Civic Centre to a number of Council owned sites. The potential move would relocate all three phase buildings at the Civic Centre site.

The current layout of the Civic Centre did not promote modern workplace practices for hybrid meetings, had surplus capacity and due to the Council's current financial resources, it was not possible to spend significantly on a new building. Making better use of existing assets would be more cost-effective in improving working conditions and enable the Council to fully embrace collaborative working across teams and services.

Particular reference was made to the freeing up a site for regeneration, which would enable surplus funds from the Guildhall Shopping Centre being used to fund the work without impacting on the taxpayer.

Councillor's Mitchell and Moore as opposition group leaders spoke on the item and raised points and questions, which were responded to by Senior Officers, as detailed further in this minute.

During the discussion, Executive Members raised the following points and questions:-

- how would the Council avoid silo working, with a number of different physical locations being considered?
- would the potential move align with the One Exeter work programme?
- would there be problematic for staff working in different physical locations?
- clarity was sought on the ring-fenced Guildhall surplus funds and why it was not usable for other services?
- It was clarified that 8.6 of the report regarding the floor of the Bradninch Place, referred to the second floor of the Bradninch Place;
- the report was welcomed, notably the carbon footprint and environmental information; and
- having a representative from the Net Zero team being invited to the project was welcomed and assurance was sought that projected carbon impact information would be provided as the project moved forward.

In response to questions and points raised by Members and opposition group leaders, the Chief Executive advised that:-

- carbon impact projections would be addressed in the next stage of work;
- it was confirmed that the report was referring to the second floor of the Bradninch Place;
- silo working was a cultural issue and work had commenced to address the issue. Regular meetings were also held to enable the senior leadership team and heads of service to work together for the benefit of the whole Council;
- the Council was looking to create more modern workspaces for improved and collaborative environments;
- there had been work undertaken for the current layout of the civic centre, to provide agile and flexible working and open plan spaces. This work also supported the Council during the Covid lockdown, allowing staff to continue working from home;
- all partners with a signed Council lease were aware of the intention to move premises;
- work was being undertaken to explore co-location options, but the primary focus was ensuring there was suitable accommodation for Council staff, with a focus on vacant units for office space at the Guildhall Shopping Centre;
- the requested funding in the recommendations, would provide the opportunity to do undertake work on various issues and costings to form an evidence base for moving forward; and
- the Council worked with trade unions through the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee (JCNC). The trade union also sat on the Council staff sounding board, working with staff on the existing Civic Centre arrangements. The sounding board and Union would also be involved with the Guildhall plans.

In response to questions and points raised by Members and opposition group leaders, the Strategic Director for Corporate Resources advised that:-

- any surplus made from the Guildhall could only be used either to enhance the centre or for housing regeneration projects, and therefore could only be used for specific purposes as agreed with the Government as part of the purchase for the Guildhall shopping centre;
- there was an internal resource to manage disposal plans and the £100,000 budget would be used to provide additional support for developing the proposals; and
- the first recommendation was asking the Executive to agree for officers to proceed with plans and costings to move the project forward. Council were being asked to approve the second recommendation, and should they reject that, then work for the full costing would not proceed, but internal work would continue.

The Leader moved the recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Wright, voted upon, and CARRIED unanimously.

**RESOLVED** that the Executive agree for officers to proceed with detailed plans and costings for the enhancement of a number of Council-owned sites in order to relocate staff currently based at the Civic Centre.

**RECOMMENDED** that Council approve a budget of up to £100,000 to develop full designs and costings for the project, funded from ringfenced surplus funds from the Guildhall Shopping Centre.