

Report to Stronger Council Select Committee

Date of meeting: 14 July 2020

Subject: Accommodation Project



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Democratic Services Officer: Adrian Hendry

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Committee note the progress on the Accommodation Project.

Executive Summary

The accommodation programme continues to progress well. The cabinet meeting in June approved the contract award to ISG Fit Out Ltd, a larger company with significant experience in refurbishment of office buildings. The accommodation Programme Board meets monthly to oversee the delivery of the programme and covers the following workstreams:

- I. Construction works
- II. ICT
- III. Travel Plan
- IV. Furniture, fixtures and fittings
- V. Engagement
- VI. Partners

This report notes the progress made across the six project areas. The corporate plan provides key milestones for the full year 2020/21.

1. Construction Works

The contract with ISG has been agreed and mobilisation of the works have started. The contractor is currently clearing the building and setting up their site compound in the basement area. The contract works will be undertaken over quarters 2, 3 and 4 of 2020/21 with an anticipated completion date in quarter 1 next year. The contractor has provided a comprehensive work plan to deal with the implications of social distancing due to Covid 19 and this will be monitored as the works progress.

The consultants Gardner and Theobald have been appointed as Employers Agent to ensure there is effective monitoring of the costs and quality of the work as the project progresses. The contractor now has access to the Civic Offices and therefore there is no longer access for staff or members to the building. Decant arrangements for members have been established in Homefield House and in the Conder building for staff. These temporary arrangements will continue to operate during the decant period however it should be noted that a vast majority of staff continue to work from home due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

2. ICT.

All staff have been provided with the ICT equipment to enable them to work remotely and from home during the Covid 19 lockdown. This has demonstrated that when staff return to the Civic Offices the new working ratio of reduced fixed desks to staff will work effectively.

Consideration is now being given to how staff work safely going forward and planning is being undertaken to ensure EFDC meet requirements from government resulting from the pandemic.

A specialist provider of audio-visual equipment has been selected following a full tender process. Work will now be undertaken to ensure that the refurbished office has the correct level of equipment to enable staff and partners to work effectively in a collaborative work environment.

3. Travel Plan

The existing number of spaces will be reduced given the redevelopment of the Conder site however work is being undertaken to establish how to better allocate the remaining 94 spaces at the Civic Offices. The plan will also look at other means of travel into the office, those whom live within walking distance or travel on public transport. On a reduced ratio and with staff working more from home the reliance on parking becomes less. A full travel plan will be shared with the Committee at the next meeting.

4. Furniture, Fixtures and Fittings

The requirements for furniture and fittings are currently being scoped and designed. The collaborative workspace areas will be an important part of the new working environment and so the correct furniture and acoustics will be important. Two workshops with members have been undertaken to review the requirements for the space going forward. The view of these workshops has been incorporated into the design work and a further meeting will be convened to agree the final design before ordering.

5. Engagement

Staff have been involved through the Champions group and more work is now being undertaken to run some workshops to understand what has worked well during lock down and what could be done differently. This will help in the planning of how to work in a more agile way when services return to the Civic Offices after the refurbishment. Letters have been sent to the residents in the proximity of the building, the Town Council and Members to keep them updated on the refurbishment works.

6. Partners

Discussions with Partners have progressed, and positive interest has been shown. Further detail on the costs are being prepared and shared. It is also proposed to explore the option to increase the space available to let commercially to small businesses. This will help with generating more income for the Council given the challenges on the budget due to the impact of Covid 19. It will also provide more support for local businesses and generation of economic recovery.

Reason for decision:

The accommodation project supports the overall aspirations of the Council Corporate Plan.

Options considered and rejected:

The project is now underway and contract agreed. Options around the amount of space that could be let commercially are being considered as set out in paragraph 6 above.

Consultation undertaken:

Consultation continues with local partners and businesses for the potential letting of spaces and the cafe. Staff are being consulted on any changes created through the improvements to

the second floor.

Resource implications:

The contract sum is within the agreed 2020/21 budget approved at Full Council and is monitored via the Programme Board on a monthly basis.