AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

16 APRIL 2009

REPORT OF CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM

CABINET DECISION

Corporate Finance & Management - Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Laing

WORKWISE PROGRAMME – UPDATE

1. Summary

    This report is an update on the progress of the Council's Workwise programme, including an assessment of the Council's current office accommodation. It outlines a framework for development of solutions to ensure that infrastructure, policies and procedures are integrated and co-ordinated to achieve a common vision.

2. Recommendation

    That Members approve the vision and integrated approach to developing modern working methods.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

    To approve a strategy for modern ways of working.

4. Members' Interests

    Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

    Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

    A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

    *   in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;

- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

CABINET DECISION

WORKWISE PROGRAMME – UPDATE

SUMMARY

This report is an update on the progress of the Council's Workwise programme, including an assessment of the Council's current office accommodation. It outlines a framework for development of solutions to ensure that infrastructure, policies and procedures are integrated and co-ordinated to achieve a common vision.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members approve the vision and integrated approach to developing modern working methods.

DETAIL

1. Stockton is a high performing Council with high levels of resident satisfaction, as outlined by the recent MORI results, with a history of innovation and commitment to service improvement. The environment within which we operate is constantly changing and the pace of change, much the same as the pace of life, is continually quickening. Demands placed upon the Council are not just increasing but are becoming more complex, requiring us to respond more quickly and in a more flexible way.

2. It is against this backdrop that we have been considering how the organisational infrastructure can be designed and developed to facilitate rather than restrict change and thereby help to maintain our high levels of performance and satisfaction. By organisational infrastructure we mean:

    -   how people work and are managed
    -   where we work from
    -   how/whether the tools available to us are effectively utilised, particularly the use of ICT
    -   how we use, store, secure and communicate information.

3. We currently have a number of strategies and plans which link to the organisational infrastructure notably – the Council Plan, ICT Strategy, Records Management Strategy, Capital Strategy, HR Strategy and Workforce Development Plan. The Workwise programme has considered each of these to determine a vision for the way we work in the future together with an integrated approach to achieving the vision. Delivery of the programme is long-term requiring cultural change within the organisation. It also links to the Council's aims for regenerating the Borough.

VISION

4.   Building on the success of Customer First, the Workwise programme seeks to develop a modern and vibrant organisation, where staff work flexibly and harness technology. This will compliment the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation programme (EIT), providing the building blocks for service improvement and efficiency and enabling the rationalisation of office space.

CURRENT POSITION

5.   The current position in relation to the various strands of the programme, is given below:

Information & Communication Technology

6.   Until recently the Council has had more of a "utility" approach to ICT. Systems and networks are robust creating a good engine room for the organisation. Opportunities have been taken to utilise the myriad of new technologies, eg the Council's Enforcement Team have introduced new mobile technology with Global Positioning that has both reduced response times and improved the quality of information and prioritisation; but these have tended to be service-based or system-specific. The Cabinet approval of the revised ICT Strategy on 27 September 2007 saw the introduction of a proposed step change both in the direction of the service itself and to the way in which the Council embraces technology.

Information Management

7.   Information management has evolved over the years. Like many organisations there is a combination of electronic storage and manual records, this is at times cumbersome, takes substantial maintenance and includes duplication. The impact of the current approach is not only that information is often more difficult to locate, but there is significant space being utilised for storage, much of which may be unnecessary. A records management strategy has been developed and is currently being rolled out across the organisation.

Human Resources

8.   The Council is acutely aware of the importance of its employees in the delivery of high quality services. The Planning for the Future Programmes have played a key role as has Customer First, the development of competency and appraisal systems and our focus on health and wellbeing to name but a few. It is however some time since the Council reviewed its approach to flexible working.

9.   There is a flexi time system in operation in the Council but this is currently rule based and prescriptive which makes it difficult for services to adopt an arrangement that is appropriate for their area, particularly where managers are seeking to change the way a particular service is delivered. In addition the scheme fails to meet the needs of many of our employees, particularly those with caring responsibilities whether for children or elderly dependants, which can have a negative impact on attendance.

Office Accommodation

10.   A review of the main administration offices has been undertaken (see list at ***Appendix A***) and some key information is outlined below.

   •   The majority of the buildings are inaccessible for staff or visitors with disabilities. Work is planned to significantly improve access to Municipal Buildings, however many buildings by their nature cannot be changed.

- Running costs are £1.44m per annum, equivalent to £931 per person, and outstanding priority repairs and maintenance are over £600,000.

- There are currently approximately 1582 staff in office accommodation (based on Oct 08 survey) each member occupying an average 14m2 compared with a best practice average of 10m2. Space utilisation varies significantly across buildings due to the nature and type of building.

- There is a mixture of open plan and smaller offices, and no consistent approach or policy relating to individual office occupation. Again this is dependant on the building occupied.

- Given the dynamic nature of the Council, there is a large volume of office moves to accommodate service changes. These are costly, disruptive and time consuming and given the nature of change, this is likely to continue.

11. The Council's approach to accommodation and furniture is one where all staff have a desk, separate formal meeting rooms and lacks flexibility. A number of the offices reviewed have the potential to reconfigure to open plan offices or office environments which promote interaction between staff, which by implication will improve staff well being, communication and support. Research in many Authorities has shown that at any one time only 60% of desks are actually utilised during the working day (normal working out of the office). A number of other Authorities have rationalised accommodation to take account of this level of occupancy and moved towards 'team space' where staff work out of the office for large periods of time have access to office space and desks but do not 'own' a desk. This will vary dependant on services provided and would require careful change management. This has also been linked to improved use of technology. Also, given the dispersed nature of our buildings, significant time is spent travelling between sites.

12. There is clearly scope and opportunities to rationalise and improve our accommodation over the medium to long term.

AIMS AND BENEFITS OF WORKWISE PROGRAMME

13. The programme will deliver a wide range of benefits over the medium to long-term, some of which can be quantified but some which will enable wider service improvements:

- Accommodation supporting flexible working that is fit for purpose in a modern organisation
- Increasing access to services for the customer
- A more flexible workforce capable of responding more quickly to change. This is essential if the benefits of the EIT programme are to be fully realised
- Reduction in overall level of accommodation required resulting in rationalisation of buildings
- Efficiency savings
- Improved productivity, increased commitment and motivation
- Reduction in turnover and sickness levels (currently high levels within the Council)
- Benefits to employees home life balance, reduced levels of stress
- Reducing worklessness by removing the barriers that prevent people entering the labour market or helping them to remain in jobs
- Reduction in carbon emissions (buildings, level of travel)
- Maximisation of ICT and information management solutions

TAKING THE PROGRAMME FORWARD

14.   The Workwise programme will develop infrastructure to enable people to work flexibly, remotely, access systems and information from a range of locations and extend access outside of normal office hours. It will support the EIT programme as well as reducing and improving office accommodation. High level actions for each of the strands are identified below.

ICT

15.   The Strategy is geared towards providing a flexible but robust infrastructure, which facilitates more flexible and remote working. This is a corporate approach and covers flexible office/team space, mobile/remote working. As well as the equipment such as laptops, telephones and hand-held devices, the strategy also covers the issues around connectivity and the corporate applications needed to support a more flexible organisation and mobile workforce e.g. electronic access to records. Specific actions include:

- Provide a robust and flexible ICT Infrastructure
- Network solutions based on building arrangements
- End User hardware strategy PC's (laptops/telephones etc)
- Review working methods for each service area maximising the use of ICT solutions as part of the EIT process.

HR Issues

16.   Research has shown that enabling employees to work flexibly can have a positive impact on motivation, productivity, turnover and levels of absence. It also provides employers with the opportunity to review current working arrangements. The Council is extremely proactive in managing sickness absence and levels are reducing. However, absence is still above average at 10.44 days for 2008/09. Turnover levels for 2008/09 were 14.1%, which is also a comparatively high figure. The programme has considered whether changes to the flexible working arrangements might improve the current position. The programme has piloted amendments to flexible working arrangements in a number of areas and has been shown to have a positive impact on absence, morale, productivity and retention. It is therefore proposed to:

- Adopt a range of flexible working principles which can be adapted to meet the needs of the service and its users (*Appendix B*)
- Introduce of a homeworking policy to support the rationalisation of accommodation and reduction in car journeys
- Empower managers and staff to manage workload in a flexible way to both meet service requirements and support staff thereby facilitating cultural change.

This will also require new skills; the management development programme and competency framework will be amended to reflect development needs.

Information Management

17.   The records management strategy seeks to challenge what information we keep, why and for how long we keep it, how it is secured and how effectively it can be shared. Specific actions include:

- Corporate information management solution
- Clear Information Management / Record Retention Policies
- Standardised Storage arrangements

<u>Modernisation of Office Accommodation and Rationalisation of Buildings</u>

18. One of the key drivers for change at the commencement of the programme was, and still is, the rationalisation of Council buildings. By applying industry standards a reduction of approximately 7,000m2 could be achieved, which could increase significantly if a 3:2 desk ratio were adopted. This would however, require a 'big bang' approach and would need either the redevelopment of some Council buildings (utilising the buildings which lend themselves to development), or the development of new buildings and would require the disposal of existing buildings to generate funding.

19. The current economic climate would however make disposal of any buildings extremely difficult and may result in properties being stood empty. The original intention was for the Council's land and property to help facilitate regeneration across the Borough whereas vacant properties at this stage would actually have a negative impact. In addition, we are in the process of considering location options for ISAs and are about to embark on the Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation Programme; a fundamental review of accommodation is therefore not appropriate.

20. It is important however that we don't lose sight of the need to develop accommodation that supports flexible working and is fit for purpose in a modern organisation. Key principles would be:

   - Introduction of team space/shared desks/breakout areas/touchdown areas etc.
   - Rationalisation of printers and creation of ' business hubs' for printers, waste, recycling etc
   - Reduction of individual managers offices and a move towards an open plan environment.
   - Improved accessibility for disabled staff.
   - Reduce the overall space utilised for office accommodation and move towards the best practice guidelines of 10m2 per workstation.
   - Identify services where mobile working is applicable and can be enhanced through technology etc. and develop accommodation to meet the requirements. A number of Authorities that have implemented this approach have identified further reductions to their estate through introducing an average 3:2 desk ratio.

   In linking into projects such as ISAs & EIT and, in working with our partners, opportunities will arise for us to begin to adopt the above principles albeit not in the "big-bang" way referred to earlier.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

21. There are no financial implications linked directly to this report.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

22. None

RISK ASSESSMENT

23. A detailed risk assessment will be undertaken prior to implementation of the Strategy.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

24. None directly from the report.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

25. 'Workwise' has been incorporated into the ICT Strategy and HR Strategy and been subject to a detailed Equalities Impact Assessment.

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CURRENT ACCOMMODATION

Building	Available Space	No of Staff	m2 per person office	Annual Running Costs	Cost per Person	Cost per m2
Municipal Buildings	4,717	351	13	432,587	1,232	89
Gloucester House	1,487	93	16	70,740	761	48
16 Church Road	2,631	229	11	153,871	672	58
Stirling House	1,496	72	21	112,453	1,562	75
Tithebarn House	548	56	10	28,284	505	52
Bayheath House	2,940	242	12	170,403	704	58
Kingsway House	2,601	135	19	120,757	894	46
Queensway House	1,643	125	13	107,563	861	66
Ideal House	413	44	9	47,162	1,072	114
Billingham Council Offices	1,833	88	21	77,135	877	40
Alma House	1,232	95	13	62,692	660	51
Wynyard House	1,565	25	63	64,515	2,581	41
****	**23,106**	**1,555**	**14.86**	**1,448,162**	**931**	**63**

Note : Wynyard House is in the process of being vacated

Flexible Working Principles

1. The Council believes that it makes good business sense to provide policies and practices which enable employees to achieve a better work life balance. Employees should have the opportunity to make their own choices about how they balance work with the rest of their lives, whether this may be due to caring responsibilities for children or elderly parents, to pursue individual interests or to enable them to get involved with the local community.

2. We also recognise that we are placing more demands on employees to be flexible at work, whether this is taking on changed responsibilities or new patterns of working. For instance the need to be responsive to customer demands has lead to an increase in evening and weekend meetings for many officers. The new flexitime policy will enable managers to be able to manage flexibly in order to meet the changing demands on the services they provide.

3. We need to acknowledge that the Council operates in a competitive recruitment market. We need to provide a working environment which both attracts and retains a diverse range of employees and serves to enhance levels of morale, commitment and loyalty.

4. It is recognised that not all services will be able to apply the flexitime scheme in the same way – the needs of the service and of service users must come first. However it is expected that managers will apply the scheme as far as possible within their service.

5. It is expected that employees will consider the impact on their colleagues and the service of their proposed daily working arrangements and will not unreasonably organise hours of attendance to the detriment of colleagues, the service or the efficient performance of individual's duties.

6. Whatever arrangements are made within individual services, flexible working will need to operate within a framework of reasonable and manageable working arrangements that are reviewed and evaluated at regular intervals.