

# KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

## DECISION TAKEN BY:

**Peter Oakford, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services.**

## DECISION NO:

**21/00064**

**For publication**

**Key decision: YES**

**Subject Matter / Title of Decision: KCC Office Estate Strategy**

## Decision:

As Cabinet Member for **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services** , I :

- a) AGREE that the political priorities in any preferred option for the future of Sessions House include:
  - i. The retention of the County Council's strategic headquarters in Maidstone
  - ii. The modernisation and expansion of Invicta House as the main staff accommodation hub for Maidstone with office hubs located in other districts sized accordingly.
  - iii. The provision of civic accommodation in Sessions House Block C and D (Central Core)
- b) AGREE to allocate £2,082,000 from the capital feasibility MTFP allocation to enable the further testing and the development of a detailed financial and legal assessment and feasibility work to RIBA stage 3 for the preferred option before final detailed proposals are provided to Cabinet for a final decision to be taken.
- c) AGREE that the Director of Infrastructure shall work with key stakeholders to test the feasibility of future alternative uses for **blocks A, B and E** of Sessions House with detailed proposals (financially and legally assessed) to be included as part of the proposals at b) above.

## Reason(s) for decision:

The Executive believe that Sessions House requires significant investment to address the building condition issues, deliver accommodation which is fit for purpose and meets our environmental commitments.

An options appraisal was undertaken based on the pre-pandemic working styles during early 2020. It was agreed that this would be revisited, taking into account the changes in the way that we need to work post pandemic and a new accommodation model has been developed which allows a number of new options to be considered.

The Executive have considered the options, the key policy drivers and subject to the more detailed financial and technical due diligence, have selected a Preferred Option, which will see investment in Invicta House as the key staff hub in Maidstone, with Members' accommodation being provided from the civic core in Block C and D in Sessions House. The remaining key offices across the estate will be sized accordingly. Blocks A and B (the wings) of Sessions House will be considered as part of the wider master planning along with Maidstone East.

**Financial Implications:**

Net Present Value for the options has been calculated to date on an initial financial assessment, a range of assumptions and high-level indicative cost estimates. Further financial due diligence is being undertaken to ensure consistency of approach and calculations for all options considered together with a review of the qualitative assessments. The feasibility work to RIBA stage 3 will provide more detail of capital and revenue costs which will then be assessed to ensure value for money is achieved.

The capital programme includes an allocation which can be used to support the feasibility work to RIBA stage 3 for Invicta House and Sessions House.

To support the development of other uses at Sessions House a bid has been made to the Community Renewal Fund, to secure funding to support the feasibility work to look at alternative options for Sessions House within the wider context of the Maidstone East Redevelopment. The outcome of the bid is expected to be known after July 2021.

**Legal Implications:**

Investment is required in Sessions House to achieve minimum statutory compliance if it were to reopen. The proposed option will meet the Council’s obligations to its staff in terms of accessibility, inclusion and its environmental objectives. Paragraph C of the decision will require a legal assessment of the options and ownership that will be included in any final decisions that are taken.

Work to current properties will require the usual statutory approvals associated with building projects and will follow the Council’s governance processes.

**Equalities implications:**

An EqIA has been undertaken which indicates that the proposals have no adverse impact. It should be noted that Sessions House is one of the most challenging buildings in the estate when it comes to accessibility of users and this decision will enable a greater level of compliance.

**Data Protection implications:**

A DPIA has been completed.

**Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:**

A paper was presented to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and the proposed decision was discussed and **ENDORSED** with an amendment to be made to part c) of decision wording, which has been reflected above.

Extensive discussion took place at the Committee. Discussions included comments regarding the need to review working patterns of staff over time and identify what accommodation may be required post-pandemic for Staff and Members. Members welcomed that the heritage of Sessions House was being recognised.

**Any alternatives considered and rejected:**

A range of options have been considered, which have been laid out in the paper presented to Policy and resources cabinet Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> July.

**Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:**

Signed by Mr Oakford`

13 August 2021

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signed

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date