

From: Rebecca Spore, Director of Infrastructure

To: Peter Oakford - Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services

Subject: Property Accommodation Strategy - SHQ

Key decision Yes – *This involves expenditure or savings of maximum £1m.*

Classification: UNRESTRICTED report with Exempt Appendix– not for publication. Paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, refers.

Past Pathway of Paper: Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 6th November 2020
Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee, 13th July 2021

Summary:

This paper seeks to update the **Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services**, on the further work that has been progressed by the Executive since the paper to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 6th November 2020. The paper sets out the revised accommodation model, the ability of the Strategic Headquarters accommodation to meet the Council's key drivers and the preferred option.

Recommendation(s):

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services is asked to **consider and endorse or make recommendations** on the proposed decision to:

- 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 Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) allocation to enable further testing and 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.

1. Introduction

1.1. A report was provided to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 11th September 2020, on the preparation of a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) that reviewed the options for the future of the Headquarters Estate centred around Sessions House. This was reviewed by the Committee at the 6th November 2020 meeting, where it was agreed that the option appraisal should be revisited, taking into account changes following the pandemic.

1.2. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic meant an immediate and radical change to how we deliver our services and the way that we use our property assets had to be adopted. During this period, the Council has accelerated its use of technology to support both the way that we work and our delivery of services. Overnight the office workforce shifted to working remotely and service delivery shifted to a mainly online provision. As of May 2021, 17 of the 19 office buildings are open with Covid secure measures in place. Due to social distancing requirements, there are currently c.800 Covid secure desks available across the County for essential business use compared with c.5,500 desks available pre-Covid.

1.3. The key policy drivers to change the Office Estate are as follows:

1.3.1. Kent County Council's commitment to an inclusive workplace

- Kent County Council (KCC) must comply with the public sector equality duty and this applies to all of our buildings. Sessions House presents a number of accessibility limitations and in places, is not the best environment for those attending or their productivity. We need to move to an environment that is fully accessible and suitable for the needs of all those who wish or need to attend.

1.3.2. Carbon Neutral by 2030

- The current estate accounts for 46% of the total emissions that KCC produces. This is due to the large building footprint and the inefficiencies of the assets. Of the total estate emissions, 30% of this is from the office estate, even though it accounts for only 6% of the number of assets in the estate. This means that the office estate accounts for 14% of KCC's total emissions (290 tonnes of carbon per annum). Other indirect benefits of hybrid working will be reduced travel time, as staff can work from home or from a local KCC office/building or public sector partner's office, which will also reduce emissions.

1.3.3. Condition and suitability issues

- Historic under-investment in the estate over many years has created a significant maintenance backlog and suitability and accessibility issues have only been addressed in a limited manner. The office space within Sessions House is some of the oldest and most unsuitable within the estate and the meeting space for Members has had no significant investment for

the majority of the last 50 years. As a result, many services are delivered in buildings that offer a poor user experience. Urgent health and safety spend has often had to be prioritised at the expense of these major fabric and user items being addressed. This is particularly an issue at Sessions House where significant condition issues must be dealt with in all blocks, including c£6m of mechanical and electrical works and c£3m of external and internal fabric works which represents the most immediate minimum spend.

1.3.4. Reduced Requirement for Office Space

- As the earlier discussions with Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee have established, the way in which Members, officers and the public work has changed significantly. As a consequence, there is a reduction in the number of desks required compared to that of pre-covid times.
- For both Members and officers, there is a move away from traditional fixed desks and dedicated team spaces to the provision of different types of spaces for work and collaboration. Members have been quick to come forward with ideas about how meeting spaces and collaboration can be improved; these ideas will be further surveyed and included in final proposals. We also recognise the importance of providing an engaging and inspiring experience for the time that is spent in the office or at meetings.

1.3.5. Supporting regeneration and Place making

- The country is facing a significant challenge in terms of post COVID-19 economic recovery, and our staff and office locations have an important role to play in place shaping as part of this regeneration. Enabling staff to work remotely or visit an office that is local to them will mean KCC staff are contributing more to their local economy, by increasing the footfall in their town centres and rural areas, which could support growth in these areas. The Council remains committed to Maidstone as the County Town and the retention of its strategic headquarter in the Town.

2. Refresh of the SOC options for Strategic Head Quarters

2.1. Pre-pandemic, office space across the Council was allocated based on the New Ways of Working (NWoW) methodology. This was predominately based on the allocation of fixed and mobile workers and the relevant ratios applied. This is the case across most of the office buildings, except for Sessions House, the Highway offices and a few others, which currently operate on a 1:1 desk ratio basis. The original SOC assumed that NWoW 2 was adopted (a lower desk to FTE ratio). The COVID-19 pandemic has developed this thinking further with a move to a more flexible hybrid working style. This presents an opportunity to look at the Council's office use across its entire office portfolio, including at our Strategic Head Quarters (SHQ).

- 2.2. The current building condition and challenges associated with the current accommodation at Sessions House, as part of the SHQ complex, are still present and require significant expenditure in order to maintain the status quo. Whilst we may be able to address the building condition issues through investment, the space suitability challenges are significant, as is the ability to meet the key drivers as set out above. As part of the original SOC1, 19 options were considered. In September 2020 it was agreed by Members that the options related to Kings Hill should be discounted. Both the 'do minimal' option and the option to refurbish and significantly reconfigure Sessions House to attempt to provide the spaces needed for hybrid working were also discounted in the original SOC as they failed to deliver the key objectives of the Council as agreed by Members.
- 2.3. As well as modelling the Net Present Value over 40 years for each option, an evaluation of the qualitative benefits was carried out. The criteria from the evaluation in the original SOC is in appendix 1.
- 2.4. Since September 2020, as well as discussing with the Cabinet and listening to the feedback from our staff through the staff surveys, the Council has worked with workspace specialists Gensler, to consider the different types of spaces and accommodation required moving forward. The office environment will include a greater focus on the provision of space to meet, collaborate and focus. The range of spaces that will be provided are:
- Focus – for individual work at traditional desks, touchdown space, phone booths or library type spaces.
 - Collaboration – collaborative working in meeting rooms, project rooms, collaboration spaces and break out areas.
 - Connection – places to connect with people such as tea points, showcase areas, recreation space, outdoor space, wellness rooms, belief rooms and café/canteen.
 - Community – areas available to the wider community such as reception, community spaces, interview rooms and event spaces.
- 2.5. The revised Gensler accommodation model has a requirement of 13,641m² for the SHQ staff cohort and Members' accommodation. This is an 18% reduction on the original SOC area of 16,620m² and approximately half of the space that was available pre COVID-19 at SHQ.
- 2.6. The key design principles for the office space are currently being finalised. In the short term, once the COVID-19 secure restrictions are lifted, the offices will be reconfigured in line with space standards as set out in the accommodation model and will be used to trial the new spaces and embed new behaviours.

¹ The original Strategic Outline Case document can be found here:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/19%3a0997fde80c8d445f84e376cbfc3f9e20%40thread.skype/Distribution%2520Channel?groupId=5f3d54c5-b151-49d5-8212-eac17733990a&tenantId=3253a20d-c735-4bfe-a8b7-3e6ab37f5f90>

3. Summary of revised SOC Options²

3.1. Given the overall reduction in area requirements, the original financial and qualitative appraisal of the four SOC options with the most favourable cost benefit scores (combinations of vacating Sessions House, expanding Invicta House and a new build at Maidstone East or an alternative Maidstone site), were revisited to examine whether the outcome would change. In addition, three additional options were also considered, which explored accommodating provision where needed across the rest of the existing office estate (rather than a new build in Maidstone) and keeping part of Sessions House for Member accommodation. These options were possible following the adoption of the new accommodation model. The following table (1) summarises the seven options considered.

Table 1

Options Considered in the SOC			
Original SOC option name	Revised SOC ref. no.		Revised m2
Golf	R1	Vacate Sessions	
		Retain, expand and refurbish Invicta House with new Council Chamber	7,163
		Provide balance of space in new building on the Maidstone East site	6,478
		Total	13,641
Foxtrot	R2	Vacate Sessions and Invicta	
		New building at Maidstone East	
		Total	13,641
Sierra	R3	Vacate Sessions	
		Retain, expand and refurbish Invicta House	7,163
		Provide balance of space in new building on the Maidstone East site including a new council chamber	6,478
		Total	13,641
Tango	R4	As Sierra/R3, but balance of space at alternative Maidstone site	Total 13,641
Additional Options			

² The original Strategic Outline Case document can be found here:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/19%3a0997fde80c8d445f84e376cbfc3f9e20%40thread.skype/Distribution%2520Channel?groupId=5f3d54c5-b151-49d5-8212-eac17733990a&tenantId=3253a20d-c735-4bfe-a8b7-3e6ab37f5f90>

considered			
A1	R5	Vacate majority of Sessions, leaving Council Chamber and Members areas in Block C and D	1,294
		Retain, expand and refurbish Invicta House	7,163
		Provide balance of space in new building on the Maidstone East site	5,184
		Total	13,641
A2	R6	Vacate Sessions	-
		Retain, expand and refurbish Invicta House with new Council Chamber	7,163
		Provide balance through surplus capacity across the rest of the office estate across the County	6,478
		Total	13,641
A3	R7	Vacate majority of Sessions, leaving Council Chamber and Members areas in Block C and D	1,294
		Retain, expand and refurbish Invicta House	7,163
		Provide balance through surplus capacity across the rest of the office estate across the County.	5,184
		Total	13,641

- 3.2. Options that include allowing staff to use other buildings across the estate to make up the balance of space (options R6 and R7), are based on reconfiguration of the existing estate, taking space requirements from the Gensler model. For each site, the capacity released will be different as the current efficiency of each site varies. Initial figures estimate the release of capacity across the rest of the estate to be in the region of 10,000m² (approx. 30% of the capacity of the rest of the estate), which is more than required to accommodate staff.
- 3.3. It should be noted that we are also exploring the use of buildings outside of the current office estate, with staff able to use partner offices through the OPE (One Public Estate) shared space project.
- 3.4. High level financial modelling was undertaken by consultants 31 Ten who had audited the original model prepared for the SOC. This considered the reduced occupancy requirements, prorated capital expenditure and associated operating costs over a 40-year period. In addition, Infrastructure applied the qualitative scoring to the three new options, against the following criteria used in the original SOC which was still valid and set out in Appendix 1. Table 2 below summarises the options considered and the qualitative evaluation. The resultant cost benefit and Net Present Value (NPV) is summarised in the exempt appendix.

Table 2

Revised SOC ref. no.	Summary of option	Quality Score against key criteria
R6	Vacate Sessions, Invicta refurbished and expanded to include chamber, balance across rest of office estate	71%
R1	Vacate Sessions, Invicta refurbished and expanded to include chamber, balance at Maidstone East	80%
R2	Vacate Sessions and Invicta - All new build in Maidstone East	79%
R5	Vacate majority of Sessions but leaving Council Chamber and Members areas in Block C and D, Invicta refurbished and expanded, balance at Maidstone East	71%
R3	As Golf/R1 but chamber in Maidstone East	74%
R7	Vacate majority of Sessions but leaving Council Chamber and Members areas in Block C and D, Invicta refurbished and expanded, balance across rest of office estate	75%
R4	As Sierra/R3, but balance of space at alternative Maidstone site	71%

The quality score for the do minimal option, was 36% and the option to fully refurbish and significantly reconfigure Sessions House was 59%

3.5. The preferred option is R7, which although does not have the lowest NPV, sees the continued use of parts of Sessions House, investment in Invicta house to make it fit for purpose for the future workforce, and staff being able to work across the rest of the office estate. This option supports the future of Sessions House while also meeting the key drivers of supporting staff to work in a hybrid way and to reduce KCC carbon emissions.

4. The repurposing of Sessions House

4.1. As part of our overall SHQ strategy, the administration is committed to ensuring that the future uses of Sessions House in areas we no longer occupy ourselves, recognises the heritage of the building and its importance in Maidstone. The preferred option of the administration enables KCC to shape a legacy which links through to the high street, the investment in Maidstone East train station and the redevelopment of the former Royal Mail site as the gateway to the County Town.

4.2. The next step in mapping out the future for Sessions House is to develop a Masterplan, taking into account the Council's continued use of the building. A bid

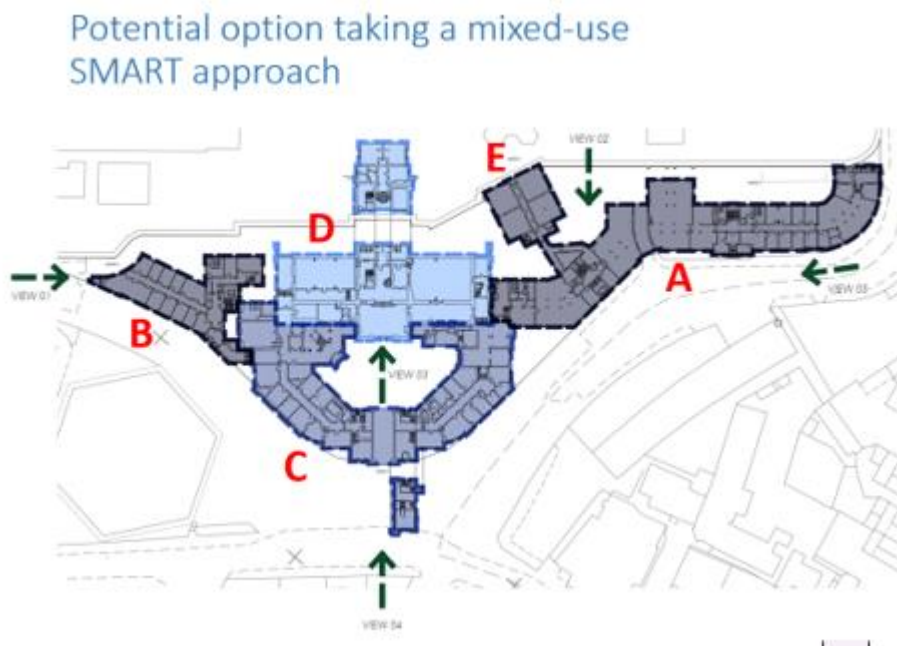
has been made to the Community Renewal Fund to enable further feasibility work to be progressed along with a decarbonisation plan to consider the options and further test market viability. The outcome of the bid is expected in July 2021.

4.3. The master planning will be iterative and developed within the context of other key Town Centre sites. Examples of the types of uses which are to be explored include the development of three distinct quarters within the building as set out below and the public realm enhancement of Session Plaza providing connectivity through to the high street, Brenchley Gardens, Invicta House and Maidstone East.

- The community skills/coworking quarter (Block B).
- The residential quarter (Block A).
- The civic/conferencing/events quarter (Block C and D) supported by the Council's ongoing use.

4.4 An indicative layout of the proposed concept to be tested in detail is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1



Please note that figures are in sqft – to convert to m2 these are divided 10.764.

5. Key risks and considerations

5.1. The original SOC contains a comprehensive risk register from which the following top risks have been updated and summarised:

No.	RISK CATEGORY	CAUSE OF RISK/DESCRIPTION	CONSEQUENCES	RISK STATUS	MITIGATIONS
1	FINANCIAL	Costs for the preferred option are significantly different to initial estimates in the NPV model and is not affordable (either or both capital and ongoing operational costs)	May be higher than budget available or mean that financial benefits of investment are not realised	Amber	Clear affordability parameter established. Robust cost control as the preferred option is developed from both a capital and revenue perspective with oversight from both Infrastructure and Finance.
2	TIME/ PROGRAMME	Indicative timescales for delivery of programme not met	Any delay would increase cost and delay achieving desired outcomes.	Amber	Project team dedicated to the programme of work to consistently monitor and manage the programme, escalating issues where necessary and maximising opportunities where possible. For example, utilising procurement routes with fast appointment times that still deliver value for money solutions.
3	REPUTATIONAL	Aspiration for Sessions House legacy and refurbished Invicta House not realised	Full financial benefits and non-financial benefits not realised.	Amber	Regular engagement with Members, partners and key stakeholders and key stage approvals via the KCC Infrastructure Gateway process and Key Decision process, which set out detailed financial modelling and benefits assessment.
4	ENVIRONMENT	Travel reduction and building adaptations do not achieve improvement.	KCC environmental impact could increase.	Amber	Ongoing liaison with Sustainable experts to make design improvements at an early stage. Engagement with staff to demonstrate benefits of reduced and sustainable methods of travel.

5.2. Financial Implications

5.2.1. The NPV calculations as set out in exempt appendix to date are based on an initial financial assessment and a range of assumptions and high-level indicative cost estimates. Further financial due diligence is being undertaken to ensure consistency of approach and assumptions for all the options considered, together with a review of the qualitative assessments. The revenue cost implications of the preferred option, compared to those of the lowest cost option, are also being calculated as part of this work.

- 5.2.2. 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.
- 5.2.3. The capital programme includes an allocation of £35m for the Strategic Office Estate, which can be used to support the feasibility work to RIBA stage 3 for Invicta House and Sessions House. £0.5m has been spent to date and the work to RIBA stage 3 and the detailed financial and legal model is estimated to be £2,082,000. Should the project not proceed, these costs will be funded from an earmarked feasibility reserve.
- 5.2.4. To support the development of other uses at Sessions House a bid of £0.5m has been made to the Community Renewal Fund to secure funding to support the feasibility work to look at alternative options for Sessions House. The outcome of the bid is expected to be known after July 2021.

5.3. Governance/legal and corporate assurance

As set out in section 6.6, the next steps will be to develop the design up to planning and then to bring the preferred option for a key decision in January, in line with KCC's governance processes. The feasibility work for the areas of Sessions House, which will not be required in the longer term by KCC will be developed for further in line with KCC's governance processes. A legal assessment will be included in the final decision papers given the restrictions and obligations placed on the Council in the ownership of a building like Sessions House.

5.4. Equalities and Data Protection

- 5.4.1. An Equalities Impact assessment (EQIA) has been completed and submitted in support of the paper.
- 5.4.2. A Data Protection impact assessment (DPIA) has also been completed and submitted in support of the paper.

6. Conclusions and Next steps

- 6.1. With the easing of pandemic restrictions and the widespread adoption of flexible working, we need to plan for a degree of office working in a different way. Time spent in the office will be a different experience, with a greater opportunity to meet, collaborate, learn and catch up with colleagues. The focus on less, but higher quality space, will allow us to deliver on our aims of reducing the carbon footprint, while investing in staff wellbeing and the attraction of quality staff that we need to deliver our services.
- 6.2. The SOC prepared last year provided a full appraisal of the estate options available to provide our new Head Office accommodation. It recommended the retention of Invicta House and construction of a new facility on the Maidstone

East development. The conclusions have been revisited in the light of our review into future working practices, due to the progress made during the pandemic with more remote and autonomous working patterns, the Strategic Reset Programme and our carbon reduction targets. The findings suggest we need less space. This changes the conclusions set out in the original SOC, as a lesser space requirement allows flexibility to shift demand for office space around capacity in the existing estate.

- 6.3. Having reconsidered the original SOC outcome and revised options, the options for a light touch approach at Sessions House and Invicta House will not meet any of the key factors in considering the future of the Head Office facility, as this would not support KCC’s accelerated people strategy or contribute towards achieving carbon neutral by 2030. The options set out in table 1, with the evaluation in table 2 and the financial assessment as set out in the exempt appendix, show that the options all score relatively closely. On that basis option R7 is to be taken forward. This option will see the retention of Block C and D to support Member accommodation, the refurbishment and expansion of Invicta House as the main Maidstone staff hub and then the balance of area will be from across the rest of the office estate.
- 6.4. The repurposing of parts of Sessions House and the investment in new facilities would represent the first steps in the modernisation and rationalisation of our office estate. Sessions House is a grade 2 listed heritage asset and is a focal part of Maidstone town centre. Its future lies in a programme of repurposing to alternative uses, which generates income to sustain its future maintenance and upkeep. Initial feasibility work has begun to consider the future of the building beyond KCC occupation. It is proposed that this work is ramped up to develop a vision statement, together with a full business case including detailed plans and costed proposals for the areas of the building which the Council will no longer need to occupy.
- 6.5. The preferred option supports the future use of Sessions House while providing suitable working spaces which meets the Council’s key policy drivers in Maidstone and across the rest of the county.
- 6.6. The next stage is to undertake more detailed feasibility and to progress the design of Invicta House and the continued used of parts of C and D block of Sessions House, up to RIBA stage 3. This would take the design work to pre-planning and pre-contract stage, before coming back to Committee for a final decision being made. In parallel with design development the project costs will be built to determine the final budgets and clarify any assumptions.
- 6.7. The timeline for the next steps for HQ and the wider office estate is as follows:

Activity	Date
Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee	13th July 2021
Cabinet Member Decision	July 2021
OPE shared space project business case	Summer 2021
Outcome of the Community Renewal Bid	July – August 2021

Office operational recovery measures in place – phased programme	September 2021 – April 2022 (phased programme)
Feasibility work Invicta/Sessions (Blocks C and D) RIBA stage 3 (up to planning)	July – December 2021
Feasibility work for Block A and D	July – December 2021
Develop options appraisals for each of the non-SHQ offices and business cases	September – December 2021
Cabinet Key Decision – Final Decision on Preferred Option	January 2022
Planning application Invicta and Sessions (Block C and D)	December 2021 - April 2022
Construction start and decant into Sessions	July 2022
Construction Invicta/Sessions House (Block C and D)	July 2022 - December 2023
Decant into new HQ space	January 2024

6.8. A detailed communications and engagement plan is being developed to inform and support staff through this change and to keep the general public informed on the future of how KCC office staff will work.

7. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

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- 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 Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) allocation to enable further testing and 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.

8. Contact details

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Appendix 1 – Extracts from original SOC about qualitative evaluation:

From page 33 of original SOC³:

In December 2019⁴ Cabinet Members were presented with a high-level options appraisal for the estate prior to initiating Project Infrared. In order to maintain continuity in approach the key weighting used in this study has been transposed across to the 10 qualitative criteria being scored.

KCC Initial Options Review (2019)		Strategic Outline Case Options Appraisal (2020)		
Title	Weighting	Title	Weighting	
ABILITY TO REMAIN SAFETY COMPLIANT AND MAINTAINED EFFECTIVELY (Proactively compliant/Warm/Safe and Dry)	30%	Corporate Image	5.0%	30%
		Accessibility	10.0%	
		Ongoing Maintenance	5.0%	
		Existing Assets	10.0%	
ADAPTIBILITY TO CHANGE FOR MODERN SERVICE DELIVERY (Innovation and Customer Focus)	40%	Working Environment	20.0%	40%
		Location of Services	5.0%	
		Deliverability	10.0%	
		Corporate Flexibility	5.0%	
ABILITY TO BECOME A NET CONTRIBUTOR TO KCC's ENVIRONMENT & EMISSIONS AGENDA	25%	Carbon Reduction	25.0%	25%
ABILITY FOR THE ASSET TO CONTRIBUTE TO REGENERATION AND GROWTH.	5%	Regeneration	5.0%	5%

The assessment methodology has been set out in a scoring scale of 0 to 5 whereby:

Score	Assessment
5	The Option fully meets and exceeds all the objective as set out in the scoring criteria.
4	The Option fully meets all the objectives as set out in the scoring criteria.

³ The original Strategic Outline Case document can be found here:

<https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/19%3a0997fde80c8d445f84e376cbfc3f9e20%40thread.skype/Distribution%2520Channel?groupId=5f3d54c5-b151-49d5-8212-eac17733990a&tenantId=3253a20d-c735-4bfe-a8b7-3e6ab37f5f90>

⁴ Cabinet Members Meeting Workshop 10/12/2019

3	The Option predominantly meets the objective as set out in the scoring criteria however with some reservations.
2	The Option goes somewhat to delivering the objectives as set out in the scoring criteria however with significant elements not being delivered.
1	The Option provides only a minimal/ negligible benefit to the objective set out within the scoring criteria however there is no disbenefit to the Council.
0	The Option in no way supports the objectives set out within the scoring criteria and/ or places the Council in a worse position.