

Call-in Request for Executive Decision 25/00057 - Property Accommodation Strategy -
Strategic Headquarters (SHQ)

Call-in request submitted by: Mr Antony Hook, Mr Alister Brady and Mr Stuart Jeffery.

Reasons for calling in the decision:

Reason one: The decision is not in line with the Council's Budget and was not taken in accordance with the principles of decision-making set out in 8.5 - Due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers.

Although this decision would reduce the capital investment budget by removing the refurbishment works planned at Invicta House which are valued at £14.3m, this decision would not deliver a long-term saving and arguably would not meet the Council's Best Value obligations. Instead, this decision would contradict previous Officer advice and place additional strain on the county's budget which already has to make difficult decisions to support the statutory services the Council provides.

The 2025-2026 agreed budget highlights within its risk register that a 'sub optimal solution for the Council's strategic headquarters would have the following consequences: *inability to address all backlog issues increases, the risk of cost overruns and potential need for higher future maintenance, running and holding costs*. This risk register was informed by the advice of KCC Officers and featured in a budget approved by KCC's Section 151 Officer. It is highly unlikely that this advice is no longer relevant and that these risks to the Council's budget are no longer present. Delaying the decision that was made in December 2024 to sell Sessions House and consolidate into Invicta House, would only escalate and materialise these Officer highlighted risks and the associated consequences.

Within the exempt papers presented at Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee in September 2025, it is noted that to complete the red and amber works previously identified for Blocks A, C & D of Sessions House, the cost would total £20m. This figure not only discounts any additional works required to make Block B within Sessions House safe and usable for staff but assumes that the previously identified red and amber works have not worsened since the evaluation. However, even with the investment of c.£20m, Sessions House will still not necessarily be fit to serve as a functioning modern office environment. This same paper, written by KCC Officers, states as a further challenge that the full scheme refurbishment of Sessions House has previously been evaluated at £67m.

In addition to the refurbishment costs, the administration must also consider the annual running costs of the buildings which are estimated to be between £2.3-2.6m for Sessions House and £1.0-1.1m for Invicta House, both of which will continue, but with Invicta House's running costs representing a budget saving in the long-term. The building of

Sessions House is also not currently fully accessible for staff or visitors, and whilst a detailed scope has not yet been defined, it is anticipated that the additional costs to make Session's House accessible would exceed £2.5m. Not only do the administration not fully demonstrate that they have considered these additional costs and their impact, the abortive costs of this plan are stated in the decision report as being estimated at £956k which the current 2025-26 budget will have to fund but does not currently account for. Furthermore, the wasted costs such as those associated with the temporary repairs and the decanting of Invicta House need to be detailed to and clarified for Members as these represent additional financial strains to KCC's budget.

In comparison to this, in November 2024 the estimated total project cost to retain and consolidate into Invicta House was £18.27m (including the previously referenced £14.3m), with an additional annual revenue saving of £1.67m at the point of completion of all works and consolidation into Invicta House. It is evident based on these figures alone, that it is not financially prudent for KCC to agree to withdraw from the plan to sell Sessions House. It appears to Members that the administration is currently disregarding the advice and financial figures provided by KCC Finance and Infrastructure Officers over multiple years which support the initial proposal to sell Sessions House, in favour of a decision that has been pre-emptively made at a long-term cost to KCC's budget.

Reason two: Respect for human rights in all its forms.

KCC has a statutory obligation to provide working conditions that are adequate for KCC Officers and meet the accessibility needs of those for whom mobility is an issue. The EQIA for this decision clearly highlights the negative impact this decision will have on KCC staff members that have a disability and/or accessibility requirements as the building is currently unfit to meet these needs. This decision highlights the historic nature of the building as being a strength, when in reality it is a hindrance to the usability of the building by staff with a mobility issue. One example of the challenges for mobility presented by Sessions House, focuses on the lifts. The existing lifts are non-compliant with wheelchair sizes and the existing lift shafts cannot accommodate an increase in lift cart sizes to align with current standards. In addition to this, the lifts are temperamental, and staff often experience periods of the lifts being out of action. The current mitigations outlined of increased signs and capacity of other office buildings do nothing to address this or any of the other fundamental accessibility issues Sessions House presents to staff and visitors.

Furthermore, not only has the lack of accessibility of Sessions House been identified by this decision's own EQIA, but KCC's disability staff group Level Playing Field have raised a number of concerns regarding the same issue. These concerns have been raised based on the lived experience of Kent County Council's own staff, and by continuing to retain

Sessions House the administration is clearly disregarding these concerns and not adequately respecting or addressing the needs of all KCC staff and visitors.

Desired outcome of this call-in:

We request that the Scrutiny Committee recommends that the implementation of the decision be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council.