

WIRRAL COUNCIL

COUNCIL EXCELLENCE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

31 JANUARY 2011

SUBJECT:	<i>OFFICE RATIONALISATION AND AGILE WORKING</i>
WARDS AFFECTED:	<i>ALL</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>DIRECTOR OF LAW, HR AND ASSET MANAGEMENT</i>
RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	<i>COUNCILLOR HOLBROOK</i>
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update as requested by the Committee on proposals for office rationalisation and on progress in relation to agile working.
- 1.2 The office rationalisation programme and an increase in agile working will support the corporate priority to improve the use of the Council's land and assets. They will also support and help facilitate improvements in service delivery.
- 1.3 The office rationalisation project is expected to deliver substantial annual revenue savings by reducing the amount of space occupied. Agile working will contribute to this.
- 1.4 The provision of administrative accommodation is not a statutory requirement but such accommodation does support the delivery of statutory functions.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the report be noted

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 This update has been provided at the request of the Committee.
- 3.2 The office rationalisation project will be overseen by the Strategic Change Programme Board as part of the Council's Strategic Change Programme.

4.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 On 18 November 2010 this Committee considered an update on the office rationalisation programme, and a report that was subsequently to be considered by Cabinet on 25 November 2010 recommending the sale of Westminster House. The Committee resolved:

- (1) That the reports be noted and an update be presented to the January 2011 meeting of the Committee.
- (2) That an update report be presented to the January 2011 meeting upon the urgent need to make progress in relation to agile working, in order to reduce the occupancy of buildings and to establish ways of working in communities to the benefit of local residents.

Office rationalisation update

4.2 Since the last meeting of this Committee progress has been made in a number of areas which are described in the following paragraphs.

4.3 At its meeting on 25 November 2010 Cabinet resolved to proceed with the sale of Westminster House to Wirral Partnership Homes.

4.4 Following that decision work has been undertaken to facilitate the vacation of the building, which is currently occupied by staff from Adult Social Care, Leisure and Cultural Services and NHS Wirral. A relocation plan is now being finalised for all the staff within the building, with some moves already under way. The relocation plan provides for the building to be vacated by 30 April 2011.

4.5 When agreeing to sell Westminster House, Cabinet considered the option of refurbishing the North and South Annexes, and a bid was made to the Capital Programme for a scheme to carry out this work. The Capital Programme was approved by Cabinet on 9 December 2010, but further information was requested in support of expenditure on administrative accommodation to enable a final decision to be taken on that element of the programme. A further report is being submitted to Cabinet on 3 February 2011.

4.6 In discussions with Wirral Partnership Homes it has been established that the timescale for comprehensive refurbishment of the North or South Annexe would preclude its use to relocate DASS staff in a single move. This is because of pressures on Wirral Partnership Homes to vacate existing accommodation in line with deadlines necessary to meet its business timescales and carry out a comprehensive refurbishment of Westminster House.

4.7 Work is continuing in preparation for tendering on the scheme to create a locality base at the Pensby Park. This was the subject of a scheme and estimate report to Cabinet on 23 September 2010. When completed, this scheme will release administrative space elsewhere and allow the disposal of

the Willowtree facility once the refurbishment of Rosclare is completed. It will also support agile and locality-based working, as outlined further below.

Progress in developing agile working

- 4.8 Prior to the Strategic Asset Review a number of local agile working 'pilots' were undertaken. These provided useful experience in the use of portable equipment by mobile workers and illustrated the need to change the way teams work to deliver maximum benefits from a move to agility.
- 4.9 To develop proposals for large scale change the approach was to identify an appropriate building on which to concentrate resources and create modern open plan accommodation into which staff could be moved whilst maximising their agility as far as possible.
- 4.10 It has now been decided that the North and South Annexes will be retained, and they could therefore provide the focus for such change. The approach to their future use will be clarified following a decision by Cabinet on 3 February 2011 on the capital programme.
- 4.11 As previously reported, Cabinet has in the past approved actions to revise the Council's approach to infrastructure and desktop equipment provision that will support rationalisation and agile working.
- 4.12 Our current ICT infrastructure is constrained in its ability to support agile working. IT Services are developing a better platform for agile working through a Virtualised Desktop Infrastructure (VDi) and Voice Over IP (VOIP).
- 4.13 A VDi infrastructure consists of; 'virtual PCs' that run on a fileserver in the corporate data centre; a service broker and, either software that runs on a normal PC, or a thin client device, that is located on the user's desk. All applications software used on desktop devices is held within the data centre.
- 4.14 The virtual PC carries out all the processing normally done by the desktop PC, therefore the only information that is transferred over the network is changes to the screen display and input from the keyboard on the thin client. This greatly improves the performance of applications over slow links and, in most instances, resolves the issues that have been identified in home working and on-line field working. Since the profiles also reside at the centre and are loaded onto the virtual devices there are no problems with hot desking and staff moving between locations.
- 4.15 VOIP telephone systems allow telephone numbers to follow users around locations by allocating the number when the user logs onto the system. Since they use the same communications protocols as data networks and applications (IP) it is possible to integrate fixed telephony, mobile telephony, voicemail and e-mail into a single system (Unified Communications). This also provides a solution for home workers and can be extended over the data network to remote locations.

4.16 So far:

- Limited VDi infrastructure has been installed in the corporate data centre and a successful proof of concept carried out by staff in IT services, including its use over 3G connections.
- VOIP gateways were purchased as part of the telecommunications network upgrade and are being installed.
- The unified communications capabilities of the existing telephone systems have been tested, including the integration with mobile telephony, voice mail and e-mail.

4.17 The next step will be to carry out a trial within an operational section to assess its effectiveness within departments and with non-technical users. If this is successful plans would be developed to roll it out across the organisation.

4.18 It should be noted that our current network infrastructure cannot support the quality of service for VOIP and the development of these approaches will be limited by the availability of resources. It would be impractical to attempt to effect major change to the IT infrastructure in all retained buildings at the same time. A planned programme of change will therefore be developed to support the agreed rationalisation programme.

4.19 The approach to prioritising and delivering agile working will now be reviewed in the light of changing circumstances. As noted above, that approach has to date been to concentrate resources and investment on the refurbishment and intensification of the use of a selected building. Capital programme bids will be reviewed as the Council finalises its budget against a background of increasing financial constraint, and there is a possibility that all currently identified schemes may not proceed. When the extent of available resources available for building refurbishment is confirmed there could be a change in emphasis to concentrate on a sequence of smaller moves. If capital resources are unavailable such moves would be managed within the limits of existing budgets and having regard to the maintenance backlog across the estate.

4.20 At its meeting on 25 November 2010 Cabinet endorsed an approach to rationalisation in which agile working will be developed and the next steps will be to:

- Complete the move of staff from Westminster House; using this as an opportunity where possible to increase agile working within DASS and reduce the number of desks used
- Review core building occupancy to take account of additional capacity created by staff departures through voluntary severance and retirement
- Review teams and services identified as suitable for developing agile working
- Agree a prioritised programme to develop agile working in services once immediate staff moves have been completed. This programme will be delivered within the constraints of existing resources and having regard to other priorities

4.21 In the meantime HR policies to support agile and home working have been finalised and consultation has taken place on them with trades unions. They will be considered by Employment and Appointments Committee on 27 January 2011.

4.22 Further information on current projects involving agility is given below:

Pensby Park

4.23 Reference is made above to the approval by Cabinet of a scheme and estimate report for this project. The scheme will co-locate two Area Teams, the South and West District Team, a number of Health visitors and the Children with Disabilities Service into the currently vacant portion of the former Pensby Park Primary School.

4.24 It will bring the South & West District social care team into a base within the area it serves. The Children with Disabilities Service is currently based at Willowtree Resource Centre, and its relocation will provide an office base for the professionals who provide services to children with disabilities and their families, and an opportunity to rationalise accommodation.

4.25 The refurbishment of the former Pensby Park Primary School will enable better service delivery and enable the department to vacate buildings within the scope of the office rationalisation project. The new office accommodation will also be used as a touch down facility for authorised personnel from across the authority. Users will include Family Support workers, Social Workers, Connexions Personal Advisors, Education Social Workers, Occupational Therapists and Education Psychologists as well as School Nurses, Health Visitors and other Educational, Health & Council professionals.

4.26 The new office space will allow these professionals to access hot desk facilities as well as book-able meeting space and admin support for staff for whom the majority of their day will be out in the community or in Children's Centres or Schools. Current proposals suggest that with agile working around 7 desks will be provided for every 10 staff who will be based at Pensby Park. The scheme design is currently being finalised.

DASS agility

4.27 Relocation of staff from Westminster House is being used as an opportunity to extend agile working within the department.

4.28 During 2010 a Care Management Locality Team has utilised remote system access to Council Systems via 3G which enables officers to undertake tasks away from the work place. Visits to service users' homes have been made more efficient as their Social Care Records are immediately accessible and updated in real time.

- 4.29 Staff have also been able to improve the management of their working day, working between meetings without returning to the office and working from home which results in a reduction of travel time.
- 4.30 The next phase of agility (having learnt lessons from the first phase) is being rolled out as part of the initiative to vacate Westminster House. The Birkenhead Locality Team will relocate to the Rock Ferry Centre and operate with a substantial reduction in desks to around 5 desks for every 10 people. There will also be a review of the current provision of IT equipment to inform the procurement of its replacement using the equipment refresh programme and the budgetary provision allocated for this purpose.
- 4.31 It is currently anticipated that following the vacation of Westminster House, DASS staff who are relocated will operate from around 40 fewer desks.

Asset Management

- 4.32 The proposed move of this team to Cheshire Lines has been planned for some time. The intention was to move on an agile basis having first minimised file storage through the use of electronic document management (using the corporate Documentum system) and with staff accessing corporate systems using the 3G network. A framework has been developed to use Documentum that meets service needs, and file storage has been substantially reduced in preparation for the move. However it has been demonstrated that the corporate property system cannot be accessed over the 3G network without an upgrade. A proposal for this will be brought forward for approval, but in the meantime the team will move to Cheshire Lines after other priority moves have been addressed and with a reduced level of agility.
- 4.33 Management of the rationalisation programme will continue through the corporate Change Programme.

5.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 5.1 Risk management for office rationalisation takes place within the governance arrangements of the Strategic Change Programme.
- 5.2 The immediate focus for rationalisation is the agreed sale of Westminster House to Wirral Partnership Homes. Wirral Partnership Homes has indicated its commitment to buying the building provided the Council can deliver vacant possession within the timescale necessary to meet its business needs. To manage the risks of this a programme has been developed to move staff currently in occupation (including some NHS staff) and this is being delivered by close working between Council officers and NHS colleagues.
- 5.3 A significant risk to the wider programme is the availability of finance to deliver required works to buildings; to install and upgrade where necessary ICT infrastructure; and to provide appropriate desktop and portable equipment. Increasing financial pressures on the Council mean that limited resources will have to be prioritised. The rationalisation programme and the

delivery of agile working will therefore be managed within the constraints of available budgets.

6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 Options for accommodation change are developed and considered within the Strategic Change programme.

7.0 CONSULTATION

7.1 Consultation has taken place with the trade unions on the revised policies that will support agile working.

7.2 Consultation is being undertaken within services directly with those staff whose workplace will be changed as a result of office rationalisation.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

8.1 None arising directly from this report.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

9.1 Financial resources

The outcome is awaited of a review of capital programme bids. This will be considered by Cabinet on 3 February 2011 and will determine the amount of capital available for administrative accommodation. The rationalisation programme will proceed in line with available capital and revenue resources. In the absence of additional capital resources building works will be addressed through existing maintenance budgets. Provision currently exists in the Capital Programme for ICT infrastructure, and within IT revenue budgets for provision and replacement of desktop equipment.

9.2 IT resources

IT staff resources will be deployed to deliver the agreed programme within the limits of current provision. Relocation of staff from Westminster House by 30 April 2011 is currently the priority, together with any associated moves to facilitate this.

9.3 Staffing – no implications beyond those referred to in the body of the report.

9.4 Asset management implications are dealt with in the body of the report.

10.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None arising directly from this report.

11.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 None arising directly from this report.
- 11.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the overall office rationalisation programme. Detailed assessments will be undertaken in each case where teams are relocated.

12.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Any refurbishment and improvement of existing accommodation would allow the creation of a more sustainable administrative estate with lower environmental impact. In particular, the opportunity would be addressed in any programme of work to improve building efficiency and reduce energy consumption and CO2 emissions wherever possible. Potential could also be considered in any scheme for micro-generation and wider sustainable benefits.
- 12.2 Other benefits could be realised through new working arrangements, for example a reduction in business mileage and CO2 emissions due to the consolidation of offices and an increase in agile working.

13.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 None arising directly from this report.

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APPENDICES

None

REFERENCE MATERIAL

None.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet – Transforming Wirral – Strategic Asset Review	15 January 2009
Cabinet – Conversion of Pensby Park Primary School to office accommodation for Children’s Services	21 September 2010
Council Excellence Overview & Scrutiny Committee	18 November 2010
Cabinet – Office Rationalisation	25 November 2010
Cabinet – Capital Programme	9 December 2010