

REPORT TO: Corporate and Inclusion Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 20th January 2026

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Deputy Leader

SUBJECT: Accommodation Review Update Presentation

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to notify Members of the Board that a presentation will be given at the meeting on the continuing work with the Council's accommodation review.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Members note that a presentation will be given at the meeting in respect of the continuing review of the Council's accommodation review.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Reviewing the Councils' accommodation was a commitment adopted by the Council in the Transformation Programme, the intention being to ensure we rationalise the use of our built assets to help reduce revenue expenditure. The Council currently has a portfolio of circa 92 properties with an annual revenue expenditure in the region of nearly £10m (in 2024/25).

3.2 A report was commissioned from JL Property Solutions in respect of the above. One of the key findings outlined in the report was that the Council currently has twice the amount of office accommodation than it actually needs, and it recommended that we should consolidate our office space by closing at least one of our main office buildings. The report also highlighted that this could present us with the opportunity to generate revenue income by letting space to third parties. The report went onto suggest some longer-term options that the Council may wish to consider in respect of its future accommodation needs, such as a new purpose-built office or co-locating with other public sector bodies.

3.3 Earlier the Executive Board considered the evidence base sourced from the findings in the JL Property Solutions report and asked officers follow an appropriate course of action which included the following: -

- Expressed a desire that we retain a 'Head Office' facility in Widnes.
- Directed that we avoided dispersing services across various building.
- requested more detailed work to be carried out in respect of future options.

3.4 Some of the key principles of our ongoing accommodation review are as follows: -

- Review the agile working policy and amend the officer to desk ratio to 2 to 1 as an average across the Council.
- Repurpose existing space to maximise the use of our assets, e.g. DCBL Stadium and Runcorn Town Hall.
- Reduce property related revenue expenditure where feasible.
- Reduce the need for future property related capital spend.
- Explore opportunities for co-locating with other public sector services to increase income/reduce costs.

3.5 To date Executive Board have approved that we work up proposals to vacate the Municipal Building having earlier found that other options for new premises would be cost prohibitive (e.g £25m for a new building or £20m to replace on site) to help reduce revenue expenditure, and work towards getting the site redeveloped as part of the wider Town Centre regeneration plan, which will also provide us with a capital receipt for the site. Executive Board have also ruled out a new build option on cost grounds and are looking towards creating a head office type facility in one of our other buildings, which will prove a far more cost-effective solution.

3.6 Some progress has been made in certain areas in respect of the above. A rationalisation of space was carried out in Runcorn Town Hall which subsequently enabled the Police & Crime Commissions office to move in, helping generate additional income. We are also in the process of refurbishing unused space within the Civic building to create additional meeting room space. Likewise unused space in Rutland House is being repurposed to create additional meeting room space.

3.7 An accommodation working group of officers has now been established whose remit is to work through the various tasks and functions which must be undertaken to allow the above to happen and the intention is to present periodic reports to this PPB on progress, of which today's report is a first briefing

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Rationalising the Council's office accommodation to realise revenue budget savings is in line with the Council's objectives of delivering services in the most cost-effective way.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Rationalising our accommodation to maximise the use of our assets will help generate revenue savings and potentially increase our income. Vacating the Municipal Building and bringing the site forward for redevelopment, will not only result in revenue savings but will bring forward a capital receipt that would be generated by the redevelopment, all of the above being in line with the objectives we have set for ourselves in the Transformation Programme.

5.2 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The redevelopment of the Municipal Building site can be brought forward as part of the wider future regeneration plans of Widnes Town Centre.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

None identified

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None identified.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

None identified.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most in Need

None identified.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Vacating the Municipal Building will help reduce our carbon emissions in line with our commitment to be net zero by 2040.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

None identified.

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 If we do not vacate the Municipal Building and rationalise our office accommodation, we will not be able to reduce revenue expenditure associated with our accommodation. We will also be faced with

significant capital costs in the future as a result of the having to ensure the building is fit for purpose over the long term.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None identified.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The Municipal Building is an inefficient building in terms of energy consumption with it being responsible for 319 tonnes of carbon emissions in 2024/25. By vacating the building and moving to an alternative facility it is anticipated that carbon savings of at least 50 to 100 tonnes can be saved per annum.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

‘None under the meaning of the Act.’