

Report to: **Lead Cabinet Member for Community Services**

Date: **23 July 2015**

Report by: **Director of Communities, Economy, and Transport**

Title of report: **Hastings Library and Register Office**

Purpose of report: **To approve revised proposals which are better value for money and would deliver an improved and enhanced Library and Register Office.**

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Agree to the revised proposals to move Hastings Register Office to Hastings Town Hall and to modernise the existing Hastings Library in its current location (the Brassey Building), incorporating the Children's Library; and**
 - (2) Delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to approve a detailed scheme of works for the proposals.**
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1 Background Information

1.1 The Library and Information Service and Registration Service in Hastings are currently delivered from three sites: the main library from The Brassey (13 Claremont, Hastings), and the Children's Library and Registration Service from two separate leased premises. In 2011, Lead Member approval was given for the purchase of 12 Claremont (the building next to The Brassey). The intention was to join the two premises and deliver all three services from this new location. A design and build scheme was commissioned for this.

1.2 Due to the complexity of the scheme, the condition of both buildings, and the impact of market forces, the projected build costs exceeded the original budget of £8.016 million. Following the development of a new, value engineered option for the scheme, an additional £1.9m of budget provision was approved by Cabinet on 22 July 2014. Since the summer of 2014, various design, survey and consultancy works have been undertaken on the project, as part of the 'pre-construction phase', which is now complete.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 Hastings Borough Council in early March 2015 informed the County Council that it would like to consider sharing Hastings Town Hall with other organisations as a way of reducing the running costs of the building, whilst ideally retaining its role as a key civic building. The available space and internal layout of the Town Hall do not make it a suitable location for the Library, but its central location and architectural merit make it a highly attractive location for the Hastings Register Office.

2.2 Moving the Register Office into the Town Hall and modernising the Library in the existing Brassey Building would enable all of the objectives of the approved scheme to be achieved at a considerably reduced cost, which would provide excellent value for money. It is estimated that this revised scheme could be delivered for around £1m less than the approved budget, returning funding to the County Council's capital programme for other high priority projects. It would also deliver wider benefits to Hastings Borough Council and residents of Hastings. For these reasons, revised proposals for the Register Office and Library have been formulated.

Proposals – Hastings Register Office

2.3 This proposal is founded on a partnership between the County Council and Hastings Borough Council. It is proposed that the Hastings Register Office will move into Hastings Town Hall. Agreement has been reached with Hastings Borough Council for the County Council to lease

an area of the Town Hall for a period of ten years. This will include the use of the Council Chamber, which will provide a very desirable venue for ceremonies. There is little internal reconfiguration required, and with minimal refurbishment cost, the Register Office could move into the Town Hall by the end of 2015.

2.4 The proposal to relocate the Register Office to Hastings Town Hall is well-aligned with the key objectives of the SPACES Programme, which seeks to drive more effective delivery of public service in East Sussex through efficient use of our estate, via partnership working and co-location. It supports Hastings Borough Council's desire to move non-essential services out of the building into more cost-effective and suitable space, whilst providing the Registration Service with high quality amenities in a centrally located and well-recognised public building. Hastings Borough Council will retain the remaining areas of the Town Hall as offices and for its customer contact centre.

2.5 The relocation of the Register Office also enables the sale of the current site by the Borough Council to an affordable housing provider, with the provision of 30 affordable residential homes. This would be a significant boost for Hastings. Hastings Borough Council has provisionally accepted an offer for the site for this purpose, which is backed by Homes and Communities Agency funding, but which requires vacant possession of the land by early 2016.

Library

2.6 The proposal would deliver the existing Library and Learndirect services, plus the Children's Library, within a refurbished and modernised Brassey Building. The original architects have been engaged to provide an initial scheme design. The revised scheme provides an area of public library space which is 82m² more than is contained within the current Hastings Library and Children's Library, and which is just 32m² less than that contained within the approved scheme for 12 & 13 Claremont. This has been achieved by more flexible use of space and reducing storage and archive materials on site.

2.7 The current revised costs are based on high level consultant estimates. If Lead Member endorses this report, we will finalise the design by late August 2015, and then go out to tender for the revised scheme in early Autumn 2015. The indicative programme for design and procurement is 32 weeks, with a further 39 weeks for construction and fit out (i.e. 71 weeks in total, if all approvals are in place). Completion by the end of 2016 is possible (with opening to the public in early 2017), if the scheme is approved by summer 2015.

2.8 As the new Register Office will make use of a high quality existing building with very little modification costs, the budget can be used to prioritise the library refurbishment, to ensure that it is delivered to a high specification that meets the needs and expectations of its users.

2.9 If this proposal is approved by Lead Member, an appraisal for 12 Claremont will be undertaken to explore the future options for the building, both within the County Council, and with our partners in the SPACES programme.

Other Considerations

2.10 The revised proposals also significantly reduce the financial risks associated with the construction costs of the approved scheme. The contractor for the approved scheme has advised Officers that there was a large increase in construction costs for the project, which would have exceeded the budget. A further re-design of the scheme would be required to enable it to proceed within budget. Given that the scheme has already been extensively value-engineered, further re-design would be extremely difficult without compromising the objectives of the project and its ability to meet the needs and expectations of the Library and Register Office users. Whilst some abortive design costs will need to be recognised, a good proportion of the pre-construction work undertaken to date will be applicable for the revised scheme.

3. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 These revised proposals meet all of the scheme objectives for an improved and enhanced Library and Register Office for Hastings at a considerably reduced cost, which would provide

excellent value for money. The proposals for the Register Office make the best use of Hastings Town Hall, an architecturally and historically important building, providing a highly desirable venue for ceremonies. By working in partnership with Hastings Borough Council, the proposal frees up estate for re-development as social housing, meeting the needs of the local community.

3.2 The revised proposals for Hastings Library provide an area of public library space which is 82m² more than is contained within the current Hastings Library and Children's Library. The building can be delivered to a high specification that meets the needs and expectations of its users.

3.3 The Lead Member for Community Services is therefore recommended to agree to the revised proposals to move Hastings Register Office to Hastings Town Hall and to modernise the existing Hastings Library within the Brassey Building, incorporating the Children's Library. Lead Member is further recommended to delegate authority to the Director of Communities, Economy and Transport to approve the detailed scheme of works for the proposals.

RUPERT CLUBB

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillors Charman, Daniel, Forward, Hodges, Pragnell, Scott, Webb and Wincott.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None