

Report to: Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change

Date of meeting: 19 May 2022

By: Chief Operating Officer

Title: Property arrangements for the Records Management Service and Library Information Service

Purpose: To consider the proposed arrangements for alternative premises for the Records Management Service and Library Information Service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is recommended to:

- 1) Delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to agree the terms of the lease for new premises in Alder Close, Eastbourne and to enter into the lease and such agreements, licences and other documents as may be necessary to secure the lease of the Alder Close premises;**
- 2) In the event of the Alder Close lease not completing within the expected timelines, to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to proceed with another option where lease terms are very similar to the current proposed property solution;**
- 3) Approve a short period tenancy, to manage any time required beyond the formal termination date within the existing lease at Unit D, Ropemaker Park;**
- 4) Delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to take all actions necessary to give effect to the recommendations set out in this report.**

1 Background

- 1.1** The Library and Information Service (LIS) and the Records Management Service (RMS) occupy warehouse and office accommodation at Unit D, Ropemaker Park, Hailsham. The building has been leased by East Sussex County Council ('the Council') since 2012. The current lease expires in September 2022. Appendix 1 provides a site plan of the building. A previous report submitted in December 2021, looked to seek approvals for an alternative property in Hampden Park, however, the proposal was unable to reach an agreed solution with the Landlord opting to remove the property from the open market. It has therefore been necessary to identify new premises and agree terms for occupation.
- 1.2** The LIS and RMS services have reviewed their service delivery models, ahead of the end of the lease term in September 2022. The review has concluded that significantly less space is needed than currently available at the leased site in Hailsham. The existing site is larger than that necessitated to support the Council's future needs, and therefore a wider review has been commissioned to explore potential alternative locations for the LIS and RMS.
- 1.3** The Council's Asset Management Plan 2020-2025 seeks to utilise the Council's existing asset base for operational use whenever possible. Following the review, a Council owned freehold asset in Polegate was identified as suitable for the LIS. The building identified in Polegate was previously used as one of seven libraries that were closed during the implementation of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy (LSCS) in 2018. Local community groups did come forward following the closure with proposals to operate a library from that building; however, despite best endeavours by the Council and community groups, these proposals didn't come to fruition. Consequently, this vacant Council asset will now be re-purposed for LIS use.

- 1.4 Refurbishment works are anticipated to commence in early Spring 2022 at the former Polegate Library which will allow the elements currently stored in part of the warehouse and Ropemaker park to be transferred permanently to this site.
- 1.5 Officers have undertaken further work to identify new suitable alternatives for the RMS following the Hampden Park property transaction not proceeding. Two main options have been considered: (i) Exploring with the landlord of the existing site (Ropemaker Park) whether there was potential for a lease of part of the building; (ii) Undertaking a property search for alternative accommodation available in the market within the County.
- 1.6 Officers from the Council's Property and Community, Environment and Transport (CET) departments collated a report which presented a shortlist of accommodation solutions for the RMS. Despite best endeavours by the Property team to agree terms for a lease of only part of the existing footprint of the current Ropemaker Park accommodation, the proposal was not viable for the landlord without the Council renting additional space beyond its requirements. Concurrently, the search for suitable properties for RMS looked at those available on the market across the whole County, rather than being focused solely in the Hailsham area, where the accommodation for the RMS is currently based.
- 1.7 A preferred property has been identified for RMS and the Exempt report later in the agenda will outline the proposed heads of terms and more details of the property in Eastbourne. The proposed asset is smaller, more suitable, affordable, and cost-effective to lease for the RMS. The proposed property solution will reduce the footprint required by the service and this aligns with the Council's Asset Management Plan 2020-2025 and also reduce the associated carbon emissions from the new facility underlined in the Council's Climate Change Emergency Plan.

2 Supporting information

- 2.1 The Council currently leases the whole of Unit D Ropemaker Park which has over 35,000 sq. ft. The proposal looks to reposition the RMS to a new facility which offers circa 12,950 sq. ft which is smaller than the previously chosen option where terms were agreed.
- 2.2 An analysis of the proposed costs of occupation compared to the current property running costs of Ropemaker show the operating costs for the preferred unit are significantly below the current property operating costs for the whole of Unit D, Ropemaker.
- 2.3 At present, the market for industrial rental space has been particularly buoyant and there is a limited pool of suitable accommodation within the sector. The Council is keen to move quickly to secure this unit for RMS operational use.
- 2.4 The legal documentation will be drafted by the landlord and the proposed structure of the property transaction will take the form of three main documents (Agreement for lease, occupational lease and licence). The Landlord has requested the Council to commit to the property by entering into an Agreement for Lease. The Council will need to undertake works to the property to customise the unit's storage capacity. A licence for alterations to carry out the works may also have to be agreed and signed with the landlord which will govern any early occupation and works (shelving / rolling racking etc).
- 2.5 An Agreement for Lease is aimed to be completed by end of May 2022 if Lead Member approval is granted. The Landlord is undertaking some preparatory works (at their own cost) in consultation with the Council. These works are expected to take 16 weeks from instruction. Practical completion of the works are due in mid September. This will trigger the lease completion by end of September 2022.
- 2.6 The lease of the site in Eastbourne is proposed to run for a term of 10 years with the Council being responsible for rent, repairs, insurance, and business rates.

2.7 If in the unlikely event, this lease does not complete within the expected timelines, Council officers will need to find other suitable leased accommodation so this report does provide a further delegation to proceed with another option where lease terms are very similar to the current proposed property solution.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 The proposed asset is smaller, more suitable, affordable, and cost-effective to lease for the RMS. The proposed property solution will reduce the footprint required by the service and this aligns with the Council's Asset Management Plan 2020-2025 and will also reduce the associated carbon emissions from the new facility underlined in the Council's Climate Change Emergency Plan.
- 3.2 To ensure suitable accommodation for the Record Management Service (RMS) following the expiry of the current lease in September 2022, it is recommended the Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change approves the Council entering a lease for the premises outlined above, or a similar letting on comparable terms to be used by the RMS.
- 3.3 Should Alder Close not be ready for operational use at the end of the current lease for Ropemaker Park, it may be necessary to hold over on the current agreements for a few months while remedial works and move elements are finalised.
- 3.4 The Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change is recommended to approve the Council entering a short period tenancy, to manage any time required beyond the formal termination date within the existing lease at Unit D, Ropemaker Park, should it become necessary.
- 3.5 The Lead Member is recommended to delegate authority to the Chief Operating Officer to agree the terms of the lease and to take all actions necessary to give effect to the recommendations set out in this report, having regard to the requirements to obtain best value.

Ros Parker
Chief Operating Officer

Contact Officers:

Peter Smith – Head of Asset Management and Performance
Tel. No. 01273 337647
Email: peter.smith@eastsussex.gov.uk

Nigel Brown - Assistant Director – Property
Tel. No. 07394 410630
Email: Nigel.brown@eastsussex.gov.uk