Committee:	**Lead Cabinet Member for Resources**
Date:	**24 September 2015**
Title of Report:	**Meanwhile Use of vacant Council Property**
By:	**Chief Operating Officer**
Purpose of Report:	**To note a motion for the Council to adopt a policy of encouraging Meanwhile Use of vacant Council property where suitable**

RECOMMENDATION: The Lead Member is recommended to:
  1) **Recommend to County Council to agree the motion as set out in paragraph 1.1.**
  2) *Agree the revision of the Disposal Policy, as detailed in paragraph 2.8 of the report, subject to the motion being agreed by County Council.*

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1.   Background

1.1   The following Notice of Motion has been submitted by Councillors Lambert and Hodges:

East Sussex County Council has a substantial asset portfolio. In common with other local authorities, as austerity bites and services are delivered in different ways, this portfolio is inevitably shrinking. However this does not have to mean a shrinking of ambition or energy. The meanwhile use of assets for community benefit can unlock and use the resilience and commitment of local communities to help people help themselves.

This Notice of Motion calls on East Sussex County Council to develop a meanwhile policy for all its redundant assets to enable these to be used productively by the local community to stimulate the local economy, energize and channel local ambition and prevent decline in the built environment.

1.2   In line with the County Council's practice, the matter has been referred by the Chairman to the Lead Cabinet Member for Resources for consideration to provide information and inform debate on the Motion. The Lead Member's recommendation will be reported to the Council at its meeting on 20 October 2015.

2.   Supporting information

2.1   Vacant property can incur costs through empty business rates, maintenance and ensuring insurance policy compliance. In addition, vacant properties offer little to local economies and present a risk through vandalism. A condition of any Meanwhile Use of a Council property will be that occupation will not be at the Council's cost.

2.2   Meanwhile use is a recognised method of enabling best use of resources while reducing costs for both the building landlord and the community or voluntary group using it. The Council's existing Disposal Policy (see Appendix 1) does enable meanwhile use; however, there is no specific mention to interim uses of property which would assist in cost reduction, stimulate local economies and make best use of resources. It will therefore be necessary to update the Disposal Policy to reflect the criteria set out in paragraphs 2.3 to 2.6 below.

2.3   The meanwhile use of Council property will be limited to vacant sites where the occupation does not interfere with the Council's Property Strategy.

2.4   Any meanwhile use of Council property will still be subject to the Council's Disposal Policy and scheme of delegated authorities.

2.5   Any meanwhile use will compliment and not hinder the SPACES Programme.

2.6   It will be the responsibility of any interested Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisation to produce a business case for a specified building. The Council will not prepare business cases and will not offer up premises under this policy.

2.7   An update to the Disposal Policy would include wording to the effect:

"consider interim uses where this does not conflict with longer term disposal plans, is at nil cost to the council, in order to ensure best use of resources, reduce costs and where possible stimulate local economies".

This would be an additional pledge under 'Principle 4 – Work in Partnership & empower our communities'.

3.   Conclusion and Reason for Recommendations

3.1   The Lead Member is recommended to recommend that the County Council agree the motion made by Councillor Lambert, and to delegate the subsequent updating of the existing Council Disposal Policy as described in paragraph 2.7 above to the Chief Operating Officer.

KEVIN FOSTER
Chief Operating Officer

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Local Members: All

Background Documents:
None