

Report to: Lead Member for Resources and Climate Change

Date of meeting: 8 July 2025

By: Chief Operating Officer

Title: County Hall site options – Update on asset review

Purpose: To provide an update on actions outlined in recommendations in the Lead Member report on County Hall asset review - October 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- 1) Note the contents of the report; and
 - 2) Agree a further report will be presented in summer 2026 to reassess the options outlined in this report reflecting Local Government Reorganisation updates.
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1 Background

- 1.1 On 15 October 2024, the Lead Member considered a report outlining the outcome of the County Hall asset review. [County Hall asset review - LMRCC open 15 October 2024 final.pdf](#). The Lead Member agreed to a phased approach, including a number of immediate, short, medium and long-term actions. The asset review did not identify any standout redevelopment option for the County Hall site due to viability; hence, a phased approach of remaining at County Hall in the short term and exploring a potential move to alternative premises on a parallel timetable to the Council owned accommodation at Sackville House, Lewes, becoming available in 2030-32.
- 1.2 In December 2024 the Government published its English Devolution White Paper. In February 2025, following a combined submission from East Sussex County Council (the Council), West Sussex County Council and Brighton and Hove City Council on 9 January 2025, the Government announced that Sussex would be one of six areas included in the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), working towards establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority on an accelerated timescale ahead of a mayoral election in May 2026. Also in February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government invited all two-tier local authority areas to prepare plans to establish a single tier of local government. The Council, working with its District and Borough Council partners, submitted an interim proposal to Government in March 2025. The Council is working towards a detailed proposal for a single unitary authority on the footprint of the current County Council to be submitted in September 2025. This will be subject to Cabinet and Full Council approval in September 2025.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on the immediate and short terms actions agreed in October 2024. However, it is anticipated that the proposals for Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation in Sussex may impact the phased approach for the County Hall asset review agreed in October 2024 and, in particular, the medium and long-term proposals.

2 Supporting Information

An update on the actions agreed in October 2024.

Rationalising space at County Hall

- 2.1 A space utilisation assessment was made for all teams occupying County Hall in autumn 2024. The outcome of the space assessment was that all teams could co-locate in North, Centre and West Blocks of County Hall, and this provided an opportunity to rationalise operational space. In the first quarter of 2025, teams were re-located within County Hall and this allowed for East Block and South Block to be freed up. The office moves were completed in March 2025. This means the Council will be able to reduce its property operational costs at County Hall as it has reduced its footprint of space occupied.
- 2.2 The vacant blocks are now being marketed via a property agent, which started in spring 2025. There has been some interest from companies to occupy the office space, and these leads will continue to be explored over the coming months. In addition, the Council has also engaged with public sector partners to assess their accommodation needs to utilise County Hall space.
- 2.3 The Coroner Services, previously based at various locations around the county, has now centralised its core service provision and has been operating from Westfield House, Lewes, since Spring 2025, thereby reducing the need to lease or hire space around the county for this service.

South Downs National Park Authority

- 2.4 The County Hall campus is located within the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) area. The SDNPA are currently undertaking a review of the [South Downs Local Plan](#), (2014-2033) and previously sought non-statutory consultation in autumn 2024. As part of the Local Plan review, the SDNPA will be seeking identification of potential land so an assessment can be made on the suitability and achievability of potential sites. The SDNPA undertook a formal consultation (referred to as 'Regulation 18 consultation') in spring 2025; [South Downs Local Plan Review](#). The Draft Plan Review will allow residents and all stakeholders to come forward with their views. The County Council, as freehold owners of the wider campus site submitted its comments in March 2025 on proposed new allocations for the County Hall campus site in the [South Downs Local Plan Review](#) (page 139) as part of the consultation process.
- 2.5 At present, the County Hall campus does not have a current whole site allocation in the existing Local Plan as a development site for housing or other uses. However, parts of the County Hall site (land fronting onto St Anne's and the former St Anne's School site) do have current site allocations and are also listed within the Lewes Neighbourhood Development Plan. Therefore, a Regulation 18 consultation allows the County Council to identify the whole site for development as outlined in paragraph 2.4 above.
- 2.6 The SDNPA will consider all comments submitted as part of the Regulation 18 process, and the timetable of next steps in late autumn 2025 to early 2027 is set out in [The South Downs Local Plan Review - South Downs National Park Authority](#)
- 2.7 It is important to note that the Council has not made a decision but is exploring options about the future use of the campus site. The Draft Local Plan will consider revised policies and plans as an update to the current Local Plan (2014-2033).
- 2.8 The County Council and Lewes District Council continue to work in partnership seeking to ensure they can work together for any future development plans in respect of the County Hall campus.

Sussex Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation

- 2.9 It is important the medium and long-term proposals for the County Hall site are fully aligned with Local Government Reorganisation considerations. All six local authorities in East Sussex are required to submit their final plan to Government in September 2025 and it is anticipated Government will make a decision in spring 2026 on the proposed unitary organisation. This will include the spatial geographical boundaries for a new unitary(s) and its roles and responsibilities linked to the proposed Mayoral function across West Sussex, East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.
- 2.10 A new unitary authority will also need to consider its wider asset strategy, service needs and therefore future office and civic space which may impact on future options for County Hall campus as well as other office hubs from all six authorities in East Sussex.

3 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

- 3.1 Since October 2024, the immediate actions outlined in the Lead Member report have been progressed, as detailed in this report.
- 3.2 Given the impact of Sussex Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation on the long-term proposals for the County Hall site, it is proposed that a further report is presented to the Lead Member in summer 2026 to set out recommended next steps.
- 3.3 The Lead Member is therefore recommended to:
- Note the contents of the report; and
 - Agree a further report will be presented in summer 2026 to reassess the options outlined in this report reflecting Local Government Reorganisation updates.

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Local Members:
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Background Documents:
None