

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Corporate Services Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on

Tuesday 23rd July at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors: D Jones Chair
E Billington
J Carroll
E Costello
W Henderson
M Herber
C Rollins

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Debbie Marsh Corporate Services Manager
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 0

12920 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

12921 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12922 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12923 COUNCIL OFFICES

At the Corporate Services Meeting on 10th June, Members considered opportunities to enhance the council's service provision to residents through the relocation of the council offices to more suitable (visible) premises.

A special meeting had been requested to discuss the relocation further; however, Members queried why the recommendations were now focussed on enhancing the current offices rather than relocating.

The Town Clerk informed Members that, in the process of gathering comparable reports to assess properties, it had become apparent that the space at All Saints View was substantially smaller than anticipated. While the site would provide higher visibility, it would fail to achieve all the desired objectives and it would also incur a significant cost. As a result, it was felt there was no real value in presenting a report of the nature previously intended, and further discussion was required on available options.



The objectives for relocation were:

- Fit for purpose
- Public visibility
- Potential for community benefit to be factored in

Members suggested and discussed various options as follows:

- Using the Day Centre or Townsend Centre. It was currently unclear what plans Central Bedfordshire Council had regarding the future of these sites, but it was highly likely that CBC would be looking at a commercial value for the properties. Both were ageing buildings that would come with significant remodelling/repair costs. Both sites would be large enough for community use. Members felt that it was still worth approaching CBC to discuss potential use by HRTC.
- Potential to increase office space by the addition of another storey to the existing building or extending into the car park area.
- A portion of the Chamber could be sectioned off for office space and smaller meetings could be held in the remaining Chamber area.
- The Chamber could be repurposed, with meetings being held at external venues that were able to provide the requisite technology to allow for hybrid meetings. This would likely incur hire charges, but there could be ways to keep these low. Using local facilities could potentially improve visibility and community engagement, thereby meeting some of the objectives laid out in the CPC report and the Corporate Plan. Maintaining a small meeting room at HRTC's offices would also limit costs.
- There were two small rooms on site that could be employed as additional office space.
- It was understood that the lease for the Bedford Square Community Centre was due to run out in 2025 and it was worth exploring this site further with CBC. This option could be brought forward for discussion at the next Town Partnership Committee.
- Use hotdesking and hybrid working to maximise space efficiency and explore ways to make the Chamber multi-purpose.

Members agreed that some remedial work could be carried out but questioned the feasibility of spending substantial sums on the present site if they were unlikely to accommodate anticipated increases in staff, or if the community centre was likely to become available. The Town Clerk responded by advising that relocation had already been delayed, and questioned the benefits of continuing to delay when potential sites were not guaranteed.



It was highlighted that HRTC owned the current offices and that these were an asset as they were owned, freehold. It was unlikely that offices would be available again in a central location, with freehold, and provide all the attendant benefits.

It was hoped to have quotes for each of the proposed 3 items by September. In the meantime, costings for room hire could be explored. Members were advised that a condition survey may need to be undertaken on the current building.

£8,000 had been budgeted for professional services to support asset transfers and/or development of community hub project. There was also the earmarked reserve for office provision.

£14,000 had been budgeted for the foyer and comprised of some of the following allocated amounts:

- £2,000 - maintenance and refurbishment of key assets
- £3,000 - communications strategy
- £3,000 - assessing the current use and availability of existing community centres and options for the future
- £3,000 - neighbourhood plan implementation

Members requested a complete breakdown of costs when this became available.

Resolved: To obtain quotes from design architects for the development of comprehensive remodelling options aimed at:

1. **Enhancing the functionality and aesthetics of the main foyer**
2. **Expanding office and administrative spaces, including the potential relocation of the council chamber if necessary**
3. **Improving the external visibility and public presence of the council offices**

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7.44pm

Dated this 9th day of September 2024.

D. J. Jones.

Chairman _____