

Committee: Finance and Administration

Agenda Item

Date: 7 February 2008

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Title: Great Dunmow offices

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& Revenue Services

Item for
decision

Summary

- 1 An opportunity has arisen to share premises with Essex County Council in Great Dunmow. It would result in a number of significant benefits for this Council and our customers. Realising the opportunity is likely to be challenging for all concerned, not least because a number of important issues need to be dealt with and in a relatively short period of time.

Recommendations

- 2 a) Members agree in principal to move the Great Dunmow Customer Information Centre (CIC) from the Council Offices to the new Great Dunmow library, subject to negotiation with Essex County Council (ECC).
- b) This Council make best efforts to help relocate the various voluntary groups and the Great Dunmow Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) from its offices.
- c) The Great Dunmow Offices are put up for sale in due course.
- d) In the meantime, the lease for office accommodation between this Council and the Council for Voluntary Services Uttlesford (CVSU) is extended for one year, with provision for one months notice during that period. Existing arrangements with the CAB are also extended for one year, with provision for one months notice during that period.

Background Papers

- 3 Various Committee reports.

Impact

Communication/Consultation	Officers and some Members have been in dialogue with ECC, CVSU and the CAB. Committee Chairs and Directors are aware of this proposal.
Community Safety	None.
Equalities	None.
Finance	If the Offices were sold it would realise a capital receipt. It is expected that there will be ongoing revenue savings.
Human Rights	None.
Legal implications	CVSU currently lease part of the offices. The Great Dunmow CAB also occupies part of the offices. An agreement between this Council and ECC will be required for

	shared use of the new Great Dunmow library.
Sustainability	None.
Ward-specific impacts	Changes to CIC provision for Great Dunmow and surrounding wards.
Workforce/Workplace	Relocation and potential revised ways of working.

Situation

- 4 ECC is relocating Great Dunmow library to new premises within the town. This is planned for completion during autumn 2008. It has been established that the County Council is seeking to share the library premises with a partner. This Council has expressed an interest in working with the County Council on the basis that it provides a number of significant benefits. These include the potential for:
- New and purpose built accommodation providing joined up working and customer contact.
 - Cost reduction and avoidance.
 - Realising capital from the sale of the existing offices.
 - Enhanced service delivery.
- 5 The existing Council Offices currently incorporates a CIC. Under the above proposal it would be relocated within the new library and the Council Offices put up for sale. However, part of the Council Offices is currently leased to the CVSU. This lease expires in April 2008. Great Dunmow CAB also occupies part of the Offices. Both therefore need extensions to their tenancies beyond April and promptly relocating thereafter if the Offices are to be sold. It should be noted that this Council resolved in January 2004 that it would support the voluntary sector by:
- Investigating the provision of long-term accommodation within the district. Failing no better option, to undertake to provide accommodation within Great Dunmow;
 - Temporary accommodation for the voluntary sector should be provided within the existing council offices on the same terms as currently apply to Stortford Road.
- 6 In addition, the above commitment was finalised and set out in the minutes of the Extraordinary Resources Committee held in August 2004. The minutes specifically confirm Members commitment to the voluntary sector and record a resolution that a temporary lease for the Great Dunmow Council Offices, not currently required by the District Council, be negotiated for a period not beyond April 2008.
- 7 Finding alternative accommodation for the voluntary groups and the Great Dunmow CAB is likely to be challenging. All options will need to be explored and in a relatively short period of time if this overall proposal is to be realised by autumn 2008.

- 8 It should be noted that the offices are currently listed with restrictions on potential use. Officers are required to maximise the sale value of Council assets and would therefore need to explore alternative use options, ultimately through the planning and development process and again converging around autumn 2008.
- 9 It should also be noted that any sale would exclude the adjoining land currently used as a vehicle depot and workshop. This is because a suitable alternative location needs to be identified for vehicle storage and maintenance. Officers are currently exploring this issue but it is unlikely to be realised during 2008/09.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood *	Impact *	Mitigating actions
No suitable alternative accommodation is identified for CVSU and the CAB.	2	4	Officers actively work with ECC and the voluntary sector in order to identify relocation opportunities.
The existing Council Offices are not sold.	1	3	The site will be marketed by an agent at the most advantageous use.
Planning approval for alternative use is not obtained for the existing Council Offices.	2	3	Officers will prepare alternative use application for Member consideration.
Significant opportunity is lost.	2	3	Director of Operations, Head of Corporate Support & Revenue Services, Member Reference Group & ECC Project Manager closely involved.

* scale 1-4, with 1 being the lowest likelihood/impact