

**Committee:** Resources Committee  
**Date:** 22 January 2004  
**Agenda Item No:** 11  
**Title:** Dunmow Offices  
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### **Summary**

- 1 Members are aware that the Dunmow Office and Depot is probably the most important site included in the approved Asset Management Plan for future development. Indeed the plan requires a full option appraisal of the combined office and depot site. It is anticipated that the new depot site at Chelmsford Road, Great Dunmow will be available during 2006 with a transfer away from the current site later that year.
- 2 This report follows on from the resolutions of the Resources Committee of 20 November, which recommends a course of action in the context of the voluntary sector and in the appointment of consultants as follows:

“RESOLVED that

- 1 Officers to consult on the possibility of a two year lease and not beyond April 2006, with the voluntary sector for use of the Great Dunmow offices, not currently required by the District Council, as a voluntary sector centre and report back to the next meeting;
- 2 Consultants be appointed in conjunction, with the Leader, Chairman of Resources Committee, to undertake a comprehensive options appraisal, to be funded from reserves, for completion by April 2004 with a report to the following meeting of this Committee;
- 3 A Member/Officer Working Group be established to oversee (2) above and the subsequent project in consultation/conjunction with relevant partners.”
- 3 It is important to emphasise that before any medium/long term decisions are taken about the site that Members have full information from a comprehensive costed options appraisal so that the maximum potential value of the site can be understood and fully considered. The Director of Resources, as S151 officer, is responsible for ensuring that when any asset is considered for disposal, Members have full information regarding the value of various development opportunities.

### **Consultant advert and terms of reference**

- 4 The following wording has been considered and approved by the working group.

Expressions of interest are invited from suitably experienced and qualified consultants to undertake a full costed options appraisal of the District Council's property (land and buildings) in the centre of Great Dunmow.

Supporting statements should detail work undertaken of a similar nature and propose a fee structure appropriate to the information required.

Further information is available which outlines the requirements in full and which can be obtained by application to...

Further information

- The site plan
- The terms of reference

Review and cost options to reflect the following:-

The District Council's aspiration in the context of

- (a) Its quality of life commitment statements enclosed
- (b) The need to retain an information centre in Dunmow
- (c) Supporting the voluntary sector within the district.
- (d) The impact of any proposal on Great Dunmow generally.
- (e) Consultation with relevant local bodies is a requirement

There is an expectation that the whole of the site will become available towards the end of 2006 although there will be a requirement to ensure best use is made of the Council's assets in the interim within the parameters outlined above.

The appointee will be required to work with a small panel of officers and members who will provide direction and information when required. There will be a need to attend a briefing meeting, to present an interim report for comment followed by a final report to be presented to the panel by April 2004.

There is an expectation that a full comprehensive appraisal of all options for site use will be explored by the appointed consultants within the parameters outlined above.

### **Member Officer Working Group**

- 5 A member officer working group has been set up with the following membership. Councillors Gayler, C M Dean and P Wilcock, officers J B Dickson, A Stewart and Councillor Gayler was elected Chairman. There have been two meetings to date.

## Voluntary Sector

- 6 Whilst the administration of the voluntary sector is principally located in Great Dunmow, the service provided is for the benefit of the whole of the district. Therefore its current location is not necessarily critical to its successful operation.
- 7 Officers have been in discussion with the voluntary sector, who have confirmed that a short lease would not be a practicable option for them within the Council Offices at Great Dunmow, it would present too much uncertainty and not allow any opportunity for forward planning.
- 8 This difficulty has been considered by the working group who have concluded that:
- (i) There should be a commitment by the Council to provide accommodation for the voluntary sector in the long term, but not necessarily situated in Great Dunmow.
  - (ii) Temporary accommodation should be made available in the short term within the newer part of the Council Offices on the same terms as currently apply in their present accommodation in Stortford Road. £15,000 pa plus service charge for approximately 2,250 sq ft (ie between £6-7 per sq ft. The area of the newer office is 3,800 sq ft including cloakrooms.
  - (iii) The council's access officer has inspected the accommodation with a representative from the voluntary sector to look at the suitability of the accommodation in the context of disabled access. The minimum requirement for a possible short term occupation would be to amend cloakroom layouts and provide a level threshold access to a new reception area. The cost of this work has been estimated to be £3,000 and this could be funded from existing budgets.
- 9 For information, the following recommendation was agreed at the Scrutiny 2 Committee on 3 December:
- 1 this decision be referred back to the Resources Committee for reconsideration;
  - 2 the decision to 'consult on the possibility of a two year lease & not beyond April 2006, with the voluntary sector for the use of the Great Dunmow offices' be reconsidered;
  - 3 the decision to appoint Consultants 'to undertake a comprehensive options appraisal' be reconsidered;
  - 4 a Ward Councillor from Dunmow be appointed to the Member /Officer Working Group.

RECOMMENDED that

- 1 the wording for the consultant advertisement and the additional guidance information is approved to allow an appointment to be made as soon as possible
- 2 Best endeavours should be used to investigate the provision of long-term accommodation within the district for the voluntary sector.
- 3 Temporary accommodation should be provided within the existing council offices on the same terms as currently apply to the voluntary sector at Stortford Road, ie £6/7 sq ft plus service charges and that the minimum required works to provide for disabled access are carried out.

Background Papers: Council Minutes.