

Title of report: Freehold Disposal of the Town Hall, St. Owens St. Hereford

Meeting: General scrutiny committee

Meeting date: Tuesday, 10 August 2021

Report by: Statutory Scrutiny Officer

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

Central

Purpose

To consider proposals for the disposal of the Town Hall, St. Owen Street, Hereford within the context of the council's overall asset management strategy. It is important to note that the method of the disposal has not yet been determined.

The general scrutiny committee has identified this decision from the council's Forward Plan and has added this to their work programme as pre-decision call-in.

There are a range of services accessed by members of the public that are currently operating from the Town Hall. Namely, the county Coroners, registrars, storage, car parking enforcement, Custodians services and IT data room. The Town Hall also hosts two external local tenants, notably, Hereford City Council and the Business Improvement District (BID)

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The Committee reviews the proposals for the disposal of the Town Hall and determines any recommendations it wishes to make to the executive, which may enhance the effectiveness of the plans.**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options, this is a report for scrutiny to consider the council's proposed decision within the context of a wider overall asset management strategy.

Key considerations

2. The Town Hall, in St. Owens St, in Hereford is one of the County's most iconic public buildings. The Edwardian building was opened in 1904 and houses the town's civic administration, including council chambers and the registrar's office. The property is a grade II* listed building in a prominent position in the city of Hereford.
3. The now expired Herefordshire Council's Corporate Property Strategy, 2016 to 2020 notes that the Town Hall, along with other significant public buildings such as the Shire Hall will be retained for public sector occupation and use. A new Strategic Asset Management Plan is being developed to take forward a new way of managing our assets for the future and current conditions.
4. On 5 July, the Council published a statutory notice that it would be taking a key decision to dispose of the Town Hall, in St. Owens Street.
5. The council currently operates a number of services in the buildings, namely the Coroner, Registrars, Parking Services and Electoral Services. The council also delivers a range of other functions including weddings, inquests and citizens ceremonies. It is proposed that plans are developed and implemented to relocate these services within the council's property portfolio. The building also plays host to two external tenants, Hereford City Council and Hereford Business Improvement District (BID).
6. Many of these statutory services will continue to require having physical buildings within the county to continue to deliver their services for the residents of Herefordshire.
7. The City Council approached the Council with regards the future management of the asset. Further to discussions with the City Council regarding a potential interest in taking over the management of the Town Hall building, the Council commissioned a survey in 2019 to understand the condition at that time and take a view on backlog maintenance and estimated cost. The survey identified that a total of £1.8m maintenance or repairs were potentially required.
8. Previously, maintenance works to the front elevation of the Town Hall were identified and incorporated in the capital bids for the year 2017/18. The front porch had settled by approximately 50mm and was required to be supported by scaffold to keep the front entrance open and safe.
9. A sum of £421k for stonework repairs at the town hall was approved by full council as part of the capital programme in December 2016.

Current Finances Associated with the current running costs and income generated

10. The running costs of the Town Hall, based upon 2019-20, as 2020-21 figures are unreliable due to Covid 19 as a true reflection of usual expense, are as follows:.

- a. Building & Maintenance – £47,778.96
- b. Cleaning - £49,398.43
- c. Rates - £66,765
- d. Utilities - £30,000

TOTAL: £193,491.00

11. The Income generated from the Town Hall (2020-21) show the following

- e. Rental income- £25,809
- f. Services Charges - £11,864
- g. Other income - £190 (in 2019/20 this income was approximately £6k)
- h. Income generated from other sources, namely car parking fees (2019-20), was £8,465

TOTAL: £28,738.00

Community impact

12. The current proposals support the Council's County Plan (2020 to 2024) to further rationalise our property holdings to deliver efficiencies as well as new income streams to support our services.

Environmental Impact

13. The council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment

Equality duty

14. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

15. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires that the council consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Our providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.

Resource implications

16. There are no resource implications from this committee reviewing the responses. The resource implications are set out within the reports.

Legal implications

17. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendations.

Risk management

18. These are set out in the appended reports

Consultees

None

Appendices

Appendix A: Town Hall Data – General Scrutiny Committee

Background papers

Herefordshire Council – Corporate Property Strategy 2016 – 2020

