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## Policy and Finance Committee

**Date:** 20 September 2021

**Title:** Facilities Improvements

**Purpose of the Report:**

To consider a request for expenditure from Earmarked Reserves.

**Contact Officer:**

Sarah Sandiford, Deputy Town Clerk

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| <b>Corporate Objective/s</b>        | LLTC Five Year Plan – Objectives 1 (To regularly review how we communicate and seek to embrace new technologies) & 2 (To continue to aim towards a paperless office). |  |
| <b>Implications:</b>                |   |  |
| <b>Financial</b>                    | Yes   | Within available earmarked reserve funds as set out in the report.             |
| <b>Human Resources</b>              | No  |  |
| <b>Operational/Service delivery</b> | Yes   | To ensure the council can operate effectively.                                 |
| <b>Procedural/Legal</b>             | No  |  |
| <b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>       | Yes   | To mitigate Covid risks by facilitating remote meeting attendance.             |
| <b>Environmental Aims</b>           | Yes   | To make better use of available office space given a lesser reliance on paper. |

### 1 RECOMMENDATION/S

Should the Committee be minded, the proposals are:

- 1.1 To approve, in principle, expenditure of £23,000 from the Facilities Improvements earmarked reserve (£134,296 available) for the purposes set out in paragraph 4.
- 1.2 To note expenditure to date from the same earmarked reserve as set out in paragraph 3.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At its meeting held 21 June 2021, the Policy & Finance Committee received a report on the year end accounts for 2020-21 and endorsed the recommendation to create a Facilities Improvement earmarked reserve with the outturn from that financial year (£137,754).
- 2.2 The purpose of the funds was to make a meaningful contribution towards improving working and operational conditions at the Council's main offices and owned assets, as well as improving environmental efficiency. Proposals included the replacement of office furniture and Council Chamber furniture, as well as the purchase of audio visual equipment to facilitate hybrid meetings.
- 2.3 Initial authorisation was sought for expenditure of up to £3,000 to facilitate Covid mitigation measures.
- 2.4 At its meeting held 28 June 2021, the recommendations made by Committee were endorsed by Council.

## **3 EXPENDITURE TO DATE**

- 3.1 Expenditure to date has focussed on the purchase of equipment to help facilitate hybrid meetings, with the aim of reducing the number of people physically present at meetings and thus mitigate the ongoing Covid-19 risks.
- 3.2 At its meeting held 26 July 2021, the Committee received and endorsed a report in respect of increasing White House accommodation to increase storage space and for the costs of £8,250 per annum to be met from the Facilities Improvements earmarked reserve until such time as it could be included in the annual revenue budget.

## **4 PROPOSED EXPENDITURE**

### **4.1 Central Services office**

The current main office furniture has not changed for many years and is in declining condition. In addition, its bulk means that room capacity is compromised. Three furniture suppliers were approached to undertake an audit and the results of this work indicate that capacity could easily be increased from the current 4 to either 6 or 8 members of staff. Whilst desks will be smaller than at present, this will be balanced by having additional storage elsewhere in the building so that items such as Mayoral events goods or I.T. equipment can be accommodated elsewhere, but remain easily accessible.

Indicative costs for 8 desks, pedestals, monitor arms, power supply, delivery and installation are in the region of £5,000 - £6,000. Chairs would be in

addition to this (estimated up to £2,000 for 8 chairs). Additional costs might result from the need to move or add to existing I.T. ports and power sockets.

#### 4.2 Council Chamber

As Members will be aware, the existing furniture in the Council Chamber has been in place for some years and is extremely solid and well constructed. However, it is also extremely heavy and unwieldy when any reconfiguration of the room is required, either for Council purposes or wider community use. The three largest tables cannot be removed from the room without dismantling them. Several members of staff are needed to make any changes in room set-up.

A report to Council in July 2021 highlighted that the Council Chamber, originally intended for 15 elected Members, is no longer fit for purpose and that a larger venue should be used for meetings of Full Council.

Quotes have therefore been sought for new furniture to accommodate 16 people. Tables would have folding tops to allow for easy storage if not in use and chairs (30) would be stackable. Indicative costs for new furniture are approximately £6,000.

#### 4.3 New meeting room

The existing meeting room furniture will be moved to a larger upstairs room in the White House, to be used not only for meetings but also gatherings of staff and of Members (e.g. political group meetings). The wider space can accommodate additional furniture in the room and therefore increase room capacity. Quotes are yet to be sought but indicative costs are approximately £2,000.

#### 4.4 White House storage

Committee is aware that the only current storage at the White House is in the cellar. Capacity is severely limited and access is difficult. Conditions in the basement are not ideal for storage of files and documents. Until remedial work can be done to address recommendations arising from a recent asbestos survey, staff have been advised to minimise use of the basement.

Costs are currently being sought for appropriate shelving and cupboards to provide safer, drier and more accessible storage on both the ground floor and the first floor of the White House. Disposal of items no longer required also has a cost implication (e.g. skip hire).

Estimated expenditure approximately £3,000.

Costs for both the meeting room and storage are anticipated to include any external costs for handyman services (e.g. building furniture)

#### 4.5 Disability access audits

Quotes have been sought for accessibility audits for the White House, the Hockliffe Street building which houses the Teenage Advice and Information Centre and the three sports and community facilities. Whilst figures are yet to be received, costs are estimated at up to £4,000 for the five buildings.

Consideration is also being given to other facilities including the play areas, the bandstand, the cemeteries (roadways and footpaths) and the public conveniences.

- 4.6 All procurement will be subject to the Town Council's Financial Regulations and unless within delegated authorisation limits, will be brought back to the Committee for approval.

### **5 SUMMARY**

- 5.1 Proposed projects will increase staff accommodation within the White House whilst also providing safer, more accessible storage space and a meeting space which can accommodate larger numbers than at present.
- 5.2 Based on the projects outlined above, expenditure from the Facilities Improvements EMR (initial funds of £137,754) would total around £34,750 (or £43,000 if costs for the additional rooms at the White House were also taken from this fund for 2022-23), with remaining funds available to potentially progress any recommendations arising from the disability access audits.

**End.**