

Divisions Affected - All

CABINET

15 November 2022

PROPERTY AND ASSETS STRATEGY

Report by Corporate Director Customers, Organisational Development and Resources

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Adopt the strategy as set out at annex 1.
 - b) Request that the Director of Property establishes a cross party Cabinet Advisory Group to oversee the development of the options and business cases for the city centre accommodation review, part of the operational assets portfolio (annex 2).
 - c) Request officers provide regular updates with regards to the implementation of the strategy against a suite of key performance indicators.
 - d) Note the feedback provided by the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
 - e) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director for Customers, Organisational Development and Resources, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Property to make minor amendments to the strategy in response to feedback from the cross party Cabinet Advisory Group (recommendation b).

Executive Summary

2. This paper presents a property strategy for Oxfordshire County Council which set out the long-term strategic framework for the development and delivery of economic, social and environmental objectives that relate to the council's property and assets portfolios. The strategy is presented at annex 1.
3. The property strategy sets out a set of long-term objectives covering the councils three main portfolios – operational accommodation, community assets

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and investment assets. Each of these portfolios contains a series of priorities aligned with delivering the council's corporate strategy and objectives.

4. The strategy will be implemented through a programme of detailed business cases for the development, disposal or acquisition of existing or new assets.
5. The strategy will be underpinned by a series of policies, plans and processes, for example the Community Assets Transfer (CAT) policy, the Asset Register, an Asset Disposal Register and a Service Delivery and Improvement Plan. These documents will continue to be developed, refined and reviewed as part of the ongoing delivery of the strategy.

Overview of the Strategy

6. The strategy sets out a long-term vision and objectives across the councils three portfolios (operational accommodation, community assets and investment assets). This vision includes the rationalisation of the county's operational estate and the development of a corporate centre and community hub model to provide better access to council services cross the county.
7. The strategy sets out how county council property and assets contribute to the strategic objectives of the authority, particularly climate action but also supporting a changing workforce and improving service access and delivery.
8. The strategy notes key interfaces with schools, children's placements, adult social care and community facilities, recognising the importance of the wider context in which the service delivers.
9. The strategy also identifies service development and improvement priorities to ensure that the property and facilities management service has the capacity to deliver the strategy.
10. In terms of immediate implementation priorities, the strategy sets out the following activities for the next 6-12 months. These are in addition to the routine and planned business as usual activity:
 - a) Agree a road map for Oxford city centre accommodation and the rationalisation of office and operational accommodation across the county (next six months).
 - b) Develop costed business case to implement the agreed road map (next nine months).
 - c) Plan to give up leased properties realising savings through rationalisation (next nine months).
 - d) Plan to reutilise or dispose of key empty properties including Glebe House and Speedwell House (next nine months).
 - e) Develop options and feasibility for implementation of community hub (next twelve months).
 - f) Ongoing delivery of decarbonisation programme.

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11. Annex 2 presents the paper received by the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 30 September. This sets out the strategic direction and high-level options for office and operational assets and provides the context for a detailed business case, a core delivery element to realise the priorities within the strategy.

Feedback from the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

12. The Cabinet received feedback from the scrutiny committee with six observations from the committee, a response is detailed in the table below:

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| <p><i>Observation 1:</i> The high level of the report presented to Scrutiny acted as a barrier to Scrutiny being able to take an informed position on the preferred strategic direction.</p> | <p>Noted, the paper received by scrutiny set out a strategic direction to move to a community hub model and prioritise estate rationalisation, presenting three options within the city centre. At this stage strategic direction is being sought rather than the consideration of a detailed business case.</p> |
| <p><i>Observation 2:</i> That the Cabinet will require much fuller detail to make a fully-informed decision.</p> | <p>Noted, the Cabinet is asked to agree the strategic direction as set out and commission necessary feasibility studies, options appraisals and business cases to deliver these objectives. These business cases will then require specific decision making.</p> |
| <p><i>Observation 3:</i> That there is a need to pursue the chosen strategy with urgency, and that it should be seek to co-locate with partners, and focus on using its existing buildings in preference to lease-hold buildings.</p> | <p>Agreed, these observations are reflected in the strategy.</p> |
| <p><i>Observation 4:</i> That local members have an important part to play in representing the views of their communities, and that they must be fully involved in discussions about the fate of property assets in their divisions.</p> | <p>Agreed, the strategy sets out arrangements for ongoing engagement and this paper recommends a city centre accommodation member working group.</p> |
| <p><i>Observation 5:</i> That local members should be involved in discussions about unused property assets, and that the Council should be mindful of the potential for community asset transfers within a refreshed Community Asset Transfer policy.</p> | <p>Agreed, the current community asset transfer policy facilitates transfers were appropriate and addressing empty or unused property is a key priority within the strategy. Local member engagement will be undertaken as part of any discussions.</p> |

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| <p><i>Observation 6:</i> That forthcoming office rationalisation must be closely integrated with the Council's other strategic priorities and plans, particularly with reference to staff and the Climate Emergency, and that trade-offs should be made consciously and transparently.</p> | <p>Agreed, the property strategy is a key enabler of the council strategic priorities as well as supporting workforce development and climate actions. The proposed approach to community hubs and asset rationalisation aims to support service delivery.</p> |
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Financial Implications

13. Implementation of this strategy will require significant capital investment. This will be set out as part of the council's capital programme and reviewed annually, and governance will be undertaken as part of the county council's capital governance framework. There are no additional revenue implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter, Corporate Director Finance (S151)
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Legal Implications

14. There are no legal implications arising from this strategy. Legal advice will be required as the strategy is implemented and this will be sought on a project by project basis as business cases are developed.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Monitoring Officer and Director of Law and Governance
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Staff Implications

15. There are no immediate staffing implications arising from this report or the property and assets strategy. However, it should be noted that as the priorities and objectives set out in the strategy are implemented there may be an impact on workforce location. If this occurs the council will ensure it undertakes the appropriate formal consultation with staff and unions as required by our own council policy and in line with employment legislation.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

16. There are no immediate equalities, diversity or inclusion implications arising directly from the report or the strategy. However, it is recognised that projects delivered as part of the strategy must take account of access, equality and inclusion matters and they will be subject to specific impact assessments and engagement with stakeholders and service users.

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Background papers: Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Property Strategy report for Cabinet 18 October 2022. [aebhdfh \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)](#)

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