

Date: 15 December 2021

Councillor Russell Goodway,
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Dear Russell,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 14 December 2022

On behalf of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee thank you for bringing forward the Corporate Property Strategy 2021-26 for pre-decision scrutiny. Would you also please pass Members thanks to Neil Hanratty, Donna Jones, Matt Seymour, and other officers who attended in support of this item. Members acknowledge this strategy has been delayed due to the Covid pandemic and have asked me to pass on the following observations for Cabinet's consideration.

The Committee notes that, at its core, the Strategy aims to align three key issues, One Planet Cardiff, the modernisation of the non-operational Leased Estate and the proposed move to a Hybrid-working model. We also note your aim is to rationalise the estate, disposing of tired, burdensome property to seek better returns on our investments.

Outline business case

The Committee is seeking clarity on timescales within which the business case for core accommodation will emerge. We note the outline business case for core office accommodation will set out options and enable the next administration to take a decision shortly after the election, acknowledging the need to understand the longer-term impact of the pandemic. We also note your concerns about homeworking and view that demand for homeworking may be overstated and the importance that the organisation makes provision for staff who would prefer to work from the office. We concur that the novelty of homeworking may well wear thin and there is also a particular need to factor in the requirement for conditions that support creativity and teamwork in the workplace. We therefore note that, whilst the process is underway, space estimates are still unclear, and there are many unknowns. We will advise our

successor scrutiny committee, with responsibility for core office accommodation, to factor your suggested timescales into its future work programme.

Carbon emissions

Members were concerned that homeworking simply transfers carbon emissions from the office to homes, therefore questioned whether the Council can claim that by encouraging homeworking it is offsetting carbon emissions. We acknowledge the importance of offsetting emissions generated by commuting, however carbon generated by heating core offices, particularly energy inefficient heating systems that are unable to be zoned such as at County Hall, is not necessarily saved. We also note the requirement for safe ventilation can be counter-productive in generating energy efficiencies.

Core Office strategy and Indoor Arena proposals

The Committee is keen to clarify your strategy moving forward and timescales for decision-making in respect of the feasibility plan for the indoor Arena plans. Members sought an understanding of how the feasibility plan for the Arena fits with core office requirements and the plans for County Hall. We note the Arena proposal is a conceptual master plan that identifies opportunities available to the Council in maximising Cardiff Bay as a leisure destination, whilst also aligning with public transport plans. You confirmed the Arena business case is not dependent on County Hall redevelopment plans, and the buildings can sit alongside one another. As the Council has purchased the Red Dragon centre, Members are interested in whether the land around it, including County Hall, will be required to deliver the Arena proposals. Whilst you say thinking isn't advanced, and the next administration will come forward with proposals post-election, we note you consider that the business case is stronger if County Hall is redeveloped. We also note there is likely to be a position paper on the Red Dragon centre in January 2022, setting out the business case on own merits and including the cost to the Council of acquiring the site.

Space required

In respect of future core office accommodation needs the Committee enquired as to how much space the Council will need to accommodate staff, noting your comment that the local government workforce has been in decline for a number of years. You consider there is currently surplus capacity and the delay in arriving at a clear

requirement is Covid related, complicated by the impact on design of additional space now required between desks.

Members endorse the Council's responsibility as custodians of historic buildings in the City and we acknowledge that it may not be feasible to adapt City Hall for modern office requirements.

St David's Hall

Members referred to the estimated cost of refurbishment of St. David's Hall. We note that, as the national concert hall of Wales, it is seen as a key component of the City's offer, but that a public/private partnership arrangement to ensure its preservation may need to be considered in the future. We note also that the future level of investment in the building's maintenance, estimated by the Council and presently its responsibility, would depend on negotiations with potential interested parties.

Rationalisation of public estates

The Committee recognises that the sums of public money required to refurbish and maintain the Council's estate requires some difficult decisions. Taking a wider view, we note the active pre-pandemic discussions with other public sector partners on the rationalisation of estates, and we are keen to establish whether there has been further progress. In scrutinising the PSB, the Committee recently recommended the development of a strategy setting out the opportunities for and costs of sharing accommodation.

My sincere thanks once again for taking part in the scrutiny of the Corporate Property Strategy, I would be grateful if you ensure the Committees observations inform Cabinet's consideration. As there are no recommendations at this point, I will not expect a response to this letter.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR DAVID WALKER
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
Neil Hanratty, Director of Economic Development
Donna Jones, Assistant Director, County Estates
Matt Seymour, Operational Manager, Asset Management
Chris Barnett, Project Manager
Mr David Hugh Thomas, Chair, Governance & Audit Committee
Chris Pyke, OM Governance & Audit
Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations
Jeremy Rhys, Assistant Head of Communications and External Affairs
Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer
Andrea Redmond, Committees Services Officer

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