

**HEADQUARTERS AND DEPOT FEASIBILITY STUDY
(Report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance))**

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) in relation to the feasibility study by consultants assessing the District Council's future accommodation needs.

2. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 At their meeting held on 13th July 2004, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) considered a report outlining progress to date in relation to the feasibility study assessing the District Council's future accommodation needs and the future programme in respect of the procurement of new or refurbished accommodation.
- 2.2 The Panel expressed concern that the only options being evaluated as part of the study were limited to locations in Huntingdon Town Centre and did not include the possible relocation to a greenfield site.
- 2.3 The Panel were informed that in restricting the options to Huntingdon Town Centre, the Cabinet had recognised the advantages presented by the town's public transport links, both for employees and the public. As planning permission would limit the availability of car parking at an alternative site irrespective of its location, the Panel were informed that good public transport was considered essential for the Council's headquarters. Attention was also drawn to the significant contribution which the Council's employees made to the economy of the town centre.
- 2.4 Nevertheless the Panel questioned whether a town centre location offered the most economic solution to the Council financially, having regard to relative land values. Moreover with the growing emphasis on electronic means of communication through the website and contact centre, the Panel queried whether visits in person to the Council's offices would decrease. With the further commitment to a customer service centre in the near future, the Panel suggested that the location of the centre in Huntingdon would reduce the necessity for a town centre location for the headquarters itself.
- 2.5 Given also that a number of other public sector authorities now were proposing to relocate out of the town centre, Members suggested that the character of Huntingdon was changing. Members therefore sought an assurance that, in considering the choice of location for alternative accommodation or the refurbishment of Pathfinder House, the Cabinet should have available to them comparable information for an out of town location both in terms of overall cost and the travel to work implications for employees. The Panel also suggested that an out of town location would enable a more comprehensive assessment to be made of the Council's wider accommodation requirements if the depot at Godmanchester was also to be relocated.
- 2.6 In considering the report of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Members attention is drawn to the attached annexes relating to the potential impact

of loss of employment from Huntingdon Town Centre and the relative transport accessibility of a District Council office at Huntingdon, St. Ives and St. Neots.

3. RECOMMENDATION

3.1 The Panel therefore

RECOMMEND

- a) that the Cabinet be requested to explain the reasons for the restriction of the feasibility study to three options in Huntingdon town centre only, and
- b) that the Cabinet be requested to ensure that, before deciding upon the future of the District Council's accommodation requirements, consideration is given to an alternative location outside the town centre in relation to both the overall cost of the Council and the implications for employees.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) 13th July 2004
Report to Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) 13th July 2004.

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