

County Hall move and Agile Programme (CHAP) Task Group Report on the Civic Heart move to Woodhatch



8 October 2020

Purpose of the report:

On behalf of the Resources and Performance Select Committee, to outline the County Hall move and Agile Programme (CHAP) Task Group's conclusions and next steps about the decision to move the current County Hall from Kingston-upon-Thames to a Civic Heart in Woodhatch (Reigate) to be taken at the County Council meeting on 13 October 2020.

Introduction:

1. The County Hall move and Agile Programme (CHAP) Task Group, formerly known as Moving Closer to Residents (MCTR), Task Group has been set up by the Resources and Performance Select Committee to scrutinise the Council's relocation from Kingston-upon-Thames, together with reviewing the progress and implementation of its agile working transformation programme. Since its inception in 2019, it has received numerous reports, presentations and heard from senior officers and other witnesses.
2. The membership of the Task Group is as follows: Ayesha Azad, Will Forster (Chairman), Tim Hall, Nick Harrison, Rachael Lake, and Chris Townsend.
3. As the County Council is due to discuss County Hall moving from Kingston-upon-Thames to Woodhatch (Reigate) at its meeting on 13 October, the report only covers this aspect of CHAP's work.
4. The Task Group initially met in August 2019 to consider the then proposed County Hall move to Midas House (Woking) and relayed its input to the Resources and Performance Select Committee about the proposed move.

CHAP Task Group review:

5. At its meeting on 7 October 2020, members of the CHAP Task Group considered the County Hall's relocation from Kingston-upon-Thames to Woodhatch in Reigate at the beginning of 2021 and the majority of the Task Group agreed, in principle, with the proposal.
6. At this meeting, the Task Group heard from the Executive Director - Resources and received a presentation from the Portfolio Lead officer - Corporate, who responded to questions posed by Members about the proposed relocation and explained the change in plan – to no longer move the Council's Civic Heart to Midas House, Woking, but rather to Woodhatch in Reigate, in the context of greater agile working.
7. The Task Group considered the proposed move to Woodhatch, as well as associated risks. Potential measures and actions being taken to mitigate those risks were explored by Members, who also raised and heard details about other buildings that had been considered during the identification phase as a potential option for a new County Hall or as hubs across the county, particularly in Woking, Guildford and Dorking.
8. During the deliberation and question and answer session, the Task Group highlighted what they saw as extant risks and issues, while endorsing the move in principle, as well as outlining a positive way forward. Concerns and risks are captured in paragraph 9 and a positive way forward is set out in the conclusion and next steps sections of this report below.
9. The Task Group highlighted concerns and risks as follows:
 - 9.1 **Location – sustainability and access:** Woodhatch is on the outskirts of Reigate and is currently without reliable, frequent and safe (for pedestrian) access links. This aspect needs more information and analysis of the options, including staff and Member travel arrangements (public transport links, walking and cycling). Consideration of the frequency of train services and links to Reigate railway station, regular connecting bus services, cycling and showering facilities. How will this site best cater for everyone in Surrey – east, west, north and south in terms of access and transportation links?;
 - 9.2 **Tangible and non-tangible costs:** Careful consideration of the all-in costs involved – capital, implementation and continuing operational costs is required, including an

- independent valuation of County Hall in Kingston-upon-Thames and the new site;
- 9.3 **Communication and engagement:** Communication with and engagement of Members and staff on the proposed move needs to improve;
- 9.4 **Contingency planning:** There is a need for contingency planning to reduce risks and cope with any slippages - if the County Council was not ready to operate in Woodhatch in January 2021 then should it not remain at County Hall until Woodhatch is ready?;
- 9.5 **Staff attrition, retention and recruitment:** Consideration is required of higher than expected staff attrition and the potential difficulties that could arise when recruiting, due to poor accessibility and transportation links. It was noted that it is not intended to move all County Hall staff to Woodhatch so impacting a smaller number of staff;
- 9.6 **Overarching estate, office and local ‘hubs’ strategy:** Greater clarity is required about the location of the Civic Heart in relation to the wider estate strategy and the other three potential “hubs” for residents, staff and Members.

Conclusion:

- 10 Based on the information provided by witnesses, including reports and presentation considered thus far, the Task Group concludes that:
- 10.1 Council agrees that Woodhatch could be the suitable location, in principle, for a new Civic Heart. However, public transport links to Woodhatch are currently poor and this needs to be addressed before the final decision can be taken;
- 10.2 Therefore, Council should not make the final decision to designate Woodhatch as its new Civic Heart at this stage;
- 10.3 Officers are asked to bring back plans addressing the relevant concerns raised in section 9 of the report, particularly around improvement to public transport links - ensuring sustainable, frequent and reliable transportation link and safe pedestrian access to and from Woodhatch, before Council makes a final decision on designating Woodhatch as its Civic Heart;

- 10.4 The Task Group has serious concerns on timing and the move in advance of a comprehensive office estate strategy and other factors as articulated in section 9 of this report. Therefore, a comprehensive estate strategy should cover the identification, purchase and fitting out of new office hubs, creation of a sustainable, long-term civic heart at the heart of the community and the move out and disposal of the current County Hall at the best possible value;
- 10.5 The Task Group strongly recommends robust contingency plans about the disposal of County Hall, move to Woodhatch and other office issues are created and reviewed.
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Report Author:

Will Forster

*Chairman, County Hall move and Agile Programme Task Group
Vice Chairman of Resources and Performance Scrutiny Select
Committee, Surrey County Council.*

Report Contact:

Kunwar Khan | Scrutiny Officer | Kunwar.Khan@surreycc.gov.uk