

Finance Committee

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BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL: IMPROVING YOUR SPACE PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

Bridgend County Borough Council has a formal asset management plan for the period up to 2021. This asset management plan includes a number of projects including that on *Improving Your Space* (IYS). The IYS project began in 2009 with a focus on delivering the three year office accommodation strategy 2009 – 2012. The project was managed internally and delivered through a Corporate Property Group. There was oversight of the project at the Bridgend Efficiency and Innovation Board which reported to the Council's Programme Management Board chaired by the Chief Executive.

The aim of IYS was kept deliberately simple: To rationalise accommodation and deliver benefits in public service delivery by implementation of the Council's office accommodation strategy.

Project overview

In 2009 the Council set out an office accommodation strategy for the next three years with the following objectives:

- Provide high quality flexible office space;
- Deliver savings in respect of leasing costs;
- Ensure efficient use of office space;
- Reduce facilities management costs and deliver management efficiencies; and,
- Bring about a cultural change in the delivery of services as part of the theme of Transforming Bridgend.

The implementation of that strategy was through the IYS project, which was funded from prudential borrowing and the Welsh Government's Invest-to-Save monies.

Delivering project objectives

Phase I of IYS has been completed with the acquisition and subsequent refurbishment of the Raven's Court building in Bridgend town centre and the refurbishment of existing office accommodation. The approach has brought together services from dispersed sites and created opportunities for better partnership working and improved service efficiency.

Space planning and design work has been important in maximising the efficient use of accommodation. Administrative "back-office" functions have

been brought together and synergies have been maximised by bringing together related services.

Key achievements & benefits to date

- The project has delivered sustainable, affordable office accommodation with improved standards of accommodation and efficiency. A reduced maintenance backlog, running costs and energy usage will all contribute to future efficiency savings;
- The project has delivered to date total annual rental savings of £335k and allowed for the generation of capital receipts of £636k ;
- The provision of key located buildings within Bridgend town centre acts as a visible service hub for the community with the project having concentrated many of the front facing services of the Council in the Civic Offices customer contact centre;
- Improved accessibility by bringing together a range of services under one roof and the creation and official opening in April 2011 of a new location for the registrars and family history reference library, which maximises synergies between the two services and gives the public a one-stop-shop for family history;
- Innovative use of space in the Civic Offices and Raven's Court making it multi-purpose and therefore maximised and facilitating various approaches to flexible ways of working within the Council including desk sharing;
- The acquisition of new office accommodation for mostly back-office functions has allowed leases to be released and more than 500 staff to be relocated and with the Council having been able to take advantage of property market conditions;
- The number of leased in offices has dropped from 17 to 6 with the annual cost reducing from £535k to £200k;
- The refurbishment of existing office accommodation has meant that the number of staff within the same space has been increased, but with better, more efficient space for staff;
- The delivery of a central location for staff in the borough and alternative means for staff travelling to work;
- Operation *Dejunk* – a corporate wide initiative to remove unnecessary paper and furniture proved very successful in freeing up space;
- The project has contributed to the regeneration of Bridgend town centre by the Council buying a long standing vacant building, Raven's Court. The project has moved more than 125 staff into the town centre. This has in turn increased the number of staff accessing the town centre.

- The project has also increased opportunities for cross cutting and collaboration within the Council with staff from the ABMU health locality office now in occupation in Council offices.

Learning

- Strong leadership, commitment and corporate management buy-in were essential to the delivery of Phase I of the project;
- Good financial management was key – the business case remained viable throughout the project with the invest to save component part of that;
- Project management ensured that the project was kept within budget and delivered on its benefits;
- Close working between the specialist design consultant, building maintenance, ICT, property, health and safety and service representatives meant that the new and refurbished facilities met all service and corporate requirements;
- Good communication was essential with staff consultation and regular project and work stream meetings being held.

Next steps

Phase II of IYS is currently being scoped and will continue the work already completed. It will include the development of hubs and satellites in the West, North and East of the County Borough as well as the continued rationalisation of buildings.