

CITY OF PLYMOUTH

Subject: Relocation of the Register Office to Pounds House
Committee: Support Services Overview & Scrutiny Panel
Date: 21 July 2011
Cabinet Member: Councillor Bowyer
CMT Member: Director for Corporate Support
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Ref: CT/I
Key Decision: No
Part: I

Executive Summary:

This report provides an update on the proposal to relocate the Register Office to Pounds House, which forms part of the second phase of the Accommodation Strategy. The report covers the history and previous use of Pounds House, the detail of the proposal to relocate the Register Office including parking and access and the consultation process.

The report confirms the progress to date and the potential timeline for remaining activities

Corporate Plan 2011 – 2014:

The Accommodation Strategy delivers value for money for communities and supports other corporate priorities in reducing the cost of the property estate to the council and thus freeing up finances for front line services. In particular this element of the strategy meets the service needs to provide appropriate accommodation to respond to customer requirements and supports the growth agenda by making available a city centre site for potential regeneration.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land

The Accommodation Strategy forms part of the Council budgetary delivery plans for the next three years

Other Implications: e.g. Section 17 Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management, Equalities Impact Assessment, etc.

Delivery of this element of the Accommodation Strategy does not impact negatively on these areas. There are currently DDA and anti social behaviour issues with the Lockyer Street site which will be removed as a result of this scheme

Recommendations & Reasons for recommended action:

To note the report.

Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:

None.

Background papers: Cabinet reports for the following

Accommodation Strategy approval – June 2009
Phase 2 business case – March 2011

Sign off:

Fin		Leg		HR		Corp Prop		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member											

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Accommodation Strategy

The proposal to relocate the Register Office from Lockyer Street to Pounds House forms part of the Accommodation Strategy second phase. The Accommodation Strategy seeks to provide revenue financial savings by using council accommodation space more efficiently and provide improved environments for clients and partners.

1.2 Pounds House

Pounds House is a Grade II listed 19th Century country house which was bequeathed to Plymouth City Council.

The building was fully refurbished following a major fire approximately 20 years ago. The outside of the building was redecorated in 2005 along with the repairs to the boundary wall and fountain.

Until 2008 the ground floor of the building was used for catering and other functions including weddings. The first floor was used as office space until the end of 2007. Both areas were commercially let by the city Council to external organisations.

Prior to this the building had a variety of uses including as a Register Office.

Following the vacation of the building by the external organisations, the council was concerned that by leaving the building vacant this would attract vandalism and potential anti social behaviour. To alleviate this immediate problem the ground floor of the building was used by the team developing the Life Centre project. The venue was used successfully for this purpose as a design office and was also used for public and project meetings and presentations during the planning process.

Since the Life Centre team moved to accommodation on the construction site the building has been used temporarily by the excellence cluster, part of the Directorate of Services for Children and Young People. This team is earmarked to move as part of the wider Accommodation Strategy.

The Council needs to secure a permanent use for the building commensurate with its setting to safeguard its long term future.

1.3 Proposal to relocate the Register Office.

Following several options being considered the preferred option is for the Register Office to be relocated from its current base in Lockyer Street. This will give potential advantages to the service which is currently compromised by the size and layout of its current location given the increased competition from hotels which are now able to hold ceremonies. It will also enable the service to co-locate with other complimentary functions, like the coroner and bereavement services, which it cannot do from its current base.

The current Register Office building in Lockyer Street is over 30 years old and in need of major refurbishment in particular the heating system. There are also issues with access which renders the building not fully compliant with the Disabled Discrimination Act. Also due to the city centre location of the site there are regular issues with anti social behaviour and rough sleepers.

The proposal to utilise Pounds House enables the Coroners service to co-locate with the registration service which frees up the current accommodation in The Crescent, thus saving the leased costs of those premises, but also allows benefits of direct communication creating a quicker and smoother bereavement journey for clients. Location closer to Derriford Hospital and access to the A38 provides a shorter and less complicated journey for many registration informants. The Registration Service provides services to all citizens, not only within the city but also residents of East Cornwall and South Devon as well as visitors from further afield. Close proximity to the A 38 provides easy and inviting access to couples requiring specialist marriage preliminaries from outside the city and those making application for British Citizenship as well as future service provision in conjunction with the UK Border Agency. Moving to Pounds House would encourage couples and families, from the city and beyond, to arrange and celebrate their life events in surroundings befitting the occasions.

1.4 Detail Plans for Pounds House

Ground floor and external areas – The two large rooms could be split into ceremony rooms and Court style hearing rooms for both the Coroner and Register offices. The size of these rooms is being investigated to see if they can be permanently split them and avoid a shared facility. In the entrance it is proposed to install a small reception area and shared waiting space. The room adjacent to the entrance will account for a small buffet type prep area and offices. Further back is a room with substantial steel supports; this room was part of the old bunker arrangement and will be ideal for the Register secure store room.

The ground floor lends itself quite nicely to visitors as the area is all on one level which means disabled access doesn't appear to be an issue, the building also contains a lift.

Outside to the rear of the ceremony room there are two steps which will be retained with the external decorative floor tiles and a temporary ramp will be required. From here the same level continues around the building to the parking areas. An existing ramp also makes it possible for disabled people to access the park.

The Parks team have recently planted an avenue of trees along the path leading away from the building, this produces a nice back drop for photographs together with the fountain and garden area.

First floor - This level will house the majority of the office staff for both services. Due to the nature of the works involved the majority of the area will be split into small offices. The data provision within the building is good due to recent upgrades for wiring and hub room.

The majority of the building works will be incurred on this level due to the existing layout however a large proportion of the existing walls are lightweight stud partitions which can be easily removed. The high level Victorian ceiling omit the need for suspended ceiling repairs or replacement unlike the current situation in Lockyer street which has suffered from roof leaks.

Second floor - This level is not accessible by the lift and only houses a few usable rooms. The use of this area is still be examined but is likely to be staff meeting rooms and storage.

Parking at Pounds House has already been enhanced by the removal of redundant external stores and will be further enhanced by the removal of trees within the current parking area. This will provide in total 25 parking spaces adjacent to the building. This compares to just 19 spaces at the existing Lockyer Street site.

Access to the site is via Outland Road which is one of the main arterial routes in the city served by several bus services including the Park & Ride service from the north of the city and

the city centre. The immediate access off Outland Road will be improved by widening the access into the pedestrian footpaths either side to facilitate long wedding cars.

The access road from Outland Road will be adjusted with pull ins to ensure safe access is provided for vehicles and pedestrians.

1.5 Consultation

Consultation has taken place with the local area committee, Compton & Peverell in November 2009, which supported the proposals.

Cabinet members were consulted in as part of the approval process in March 2011.

The decision was also approved at Full Council in April 2011

The decision was the subject of Overview and Scrutiny Management Board in April 2011.

Consultation is on going with residents and local business from around the existing Lockyer Street site, clients of the registration service, Friends of Central Park, GP surgeries, Hospital Bereavement Service, Approved Premises, Funeral Directors and staff.

1.6 Timescale

Surveys are currently being completed on the drainage to the site and final layout drawings are being produced. These need to be agreed with all stakeholders and the necessary tender specifications drawn up.

The intention is to source tenders in the autumn of this year with a view to a start on site in the new year. The works will take approximately 6 months to complete so the building would be ready for occupation at the end of next summer.

There are statutory processes for the Register Office service to go through to move addresses so the precise opening date will be dependant upon this process but is expected to be at the end of 2012.