

# Council to transform HQ into more modern workplace

The City of Edinburgh Council has unveiled plans to transform its headquarters into a more “modern” workplace in a bid to get staff back into the office – after it was revealed more than 80 per cent of desks in the £3m-a-year building are not currently being used.

Changes will include the creation of flexible work “hubs” with fewer fixed desks and new furniture to encourage collaborative working.

Around a quarter of Waverley Court’s workspaces could be leased out to other organisations as part of the new strategy, which it’s estimated would bring in an extra £1.7m for the authority annually.

The plans form part of a wider aim by the council to have a “smaller, more efficient, affordable and accessible estate” which it says will help achieve its net zero goals.

In addition to an overhaul of the council’s city centre nerve centre, the City Chambers and local offices will be “redesigned and adapted” with better accessibility for those with mobility issues.

The initial focus will be on Waverley Court which is the local authority’s most expensive building to run, costing £3.03m a

year, and is “currently underutilised following the return to work after the Covid-19 pandemic,” a report going before councillors this week said.

Only 14 per cent of the building’s desks were being used as of January this year, with more recent monitoring showing a “marginal increase” in occupancy.

The existing partitioned arrangement “contributes to the territorial nature of the workplace” and “results in less collaboration, isolation and creativity,” the report said.

It added: “Creating more dynamic work settings and effective ways of working will improve performance, knowledge sharing and autonomy, leading to greater employee and customer satisfaction, which will ultimately result in improved service delivery.

“By reducing the amount of fixed desks and the introduction of more desk sharing between teams and services, the intention would be to use any excess space to create a range of other work settings such as collaboration space, bookable team areas, phone booths and quiet/focus spaces.”

Space will also be freed-up by reducing the size of desks and storing more files digitally.

Furthermore officials are considering opening a new ‘community hub’ on the ground floor of the East Market Street headquarters.

The council could also look to invite public sector organisations to move in to save money and ensure the building, which cost £80m to build and opened less than 20 years ago, is taken full advantage of.

Leasing out approximately 25 per cent of Waverley Court’s desks poses the potential to generate around £1.7m a year “reducing the operational running costs by 61 per cent”.

The report continued: "Over a quarter of Council occupied buildings were built over 100 years ago and many suffer from accessibility issues due to their physical attributes.

"Throughout this project, accessible design considerations will be fundamental in all decision making."

Councillors on the Policy and Sustainability Committee will be asked to approve the corporate property strategy on Tuesday.

*by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.*

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