

Report of Head of Asset Management

Report to Chief Officer Asset Management and Regeneration

Date: 7th April 2020

Subject: Covid-19 Response – Estate Management – Temporary Building Close Down

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| Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s): | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Has consultation been carried out? | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Will the decision be open for call-in? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number: | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |

Summary

1. Main issues

- The Covid-19 pandemic and the government’s measures to manage the spread and treatment of the disease has impacted upon all of our lives, as well as businesses who have needed to adapt to the evolving situation.
- The City Council is no different in this respect and there have been substantial efforts to prioritise service provision and ensure our most vulnerable residents are supported, whilst changing the way we work. The biggest impact on the Council’s operational estate has been as a result of government imposed requirements for staff to work from home where their role allows and the closure of visitor attractions and libraries.
- As a result a number of services have closed and the number of staff working from our offices has substantially reduced.
- Working across directorates, and through Corporate Asset Management Board the list of buildings attached at Appendix 1 shows the buildings to remain operational, whilst Appendix 2 sets out the buildings proposed to be temporarily closed.
- These lists will remain under review as the situation further evolves.

2. Best Council Plan Implications (see the [latest version of the Best Council Plan](#))

- The proposals set out in this paper speak to both the Best City and Best Council ambitions and each of the Best City priorities. In particular the closure of parts of the estate which are not fully utilised supports the efficiency of the Council at this difficult time.

3. Resource Implications

- Reducing the number of buildings open to a minimum whilst continuing to support the delivery of key services, will allow the deployment of the Council's resources in different ways to support the most vulnerable at this time. The open and closing of buildings on a daily basis requires a number of staff to ensure that the building remains safe and secure whilst open and that it is cleaned. Given the potential reduction in staffing numbers through illness and self-isolation, reducing the number of buildings operational for a period of time will reduce this pressure. The temporary closure of buildings will also reduce the utility costs for a period of time, this being a key saving given the additional financial pressures on the Council at present.

Recommendations

- a) That the Chief Officer for Asset Management Regeneration agrees the temporary closure of buildings outlined in Appendix 2 and notes that this list will remain under continual review.

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval to the temporary closure of a number of operational buildings across the Council's estate as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Background information

- 2.1 The Council has a large operational estate of over 700 properties. In the region of 200 of these are offices, day centres, museums, libraries, community hubs, community centres, leisure centres and key depots which enable the Council to deliver its many services to residents in the city. Whilst the remaining properties are important to the Council's operation, they are less substantial and provide ancillary facilities.
- 2.2 The Covid-19 pandemic and the government's measures to manage the spread and treatment of the disease has impacted upon the Council's operational estate, primarily through the closure of visitor attractions as well as widespread home working where roles allow.
- 2.3 As a result all libraries, leisure centres and museums have been closed as well as attractions such as Tropical World and Temple Newsam Farm.
- 2.4 Over recent years, the Council has progressively rolled out its 'Changing the Workplace' programme which has seen the transformation of office spaces into modern working environments but has also provided staff with the technology to work more flexibly including from home. As such, the majority of Council staff have the agility and there were well placed to adapt and comply the government

guidance, which has meant that our offices are currently seeing little usage. However, there are some processes adopted by services which are heavily paper based limiting the potential for home working. This can not be addressed immediately, particularly where some of these services are likely to see increased demands on them at this time. However, work will be progressed by the Council's Digital and Information Service to explore digital solutions in due course.

- 2.5 Keeping buildings open requires members of staff to open and close buildings as well as providing ongoing management to ensure that they are secure, cleaned and that systems are fully operational. Given the potential number of staff who could become ill or self-isolating this will be increasingly difficult to manage. It is therefore necessary to review our estate appropriately through these difficult times and that only buildings which are essential to support front line service provision remain open. This will allow resource and particularly staffing pressures to be overcome and also the potential to redirect resources to support services to our most vulnerable residents.

3. Main issues

- 3.1 Through Corporate Asset Management Board, the requirements of all Directorates have been brought together, and the schedules appended to this report have been prepared. Appendix 1 shows the buildings to remain operational, whilst Appendix 2 sets out those which are proposed for temporary closure.
- 3.2 As service provision continues to change in response to the evolving situation, so too will the requirements of our estate. As such, the list of operational buildings will remain under continual review and further closures will be progressed where it is inappropriate to keep a building open from a staff safety perspective or on cost grounds, where alternative appropriate accommodation is available nearby.
- 3.3 Where large buildings such as Merrion House remain open, these buildings will be managed on a flexible basis so that only as much of the building as is required, is opened up therefore reducing the resources required to manage the building. However, this offers flexibility to further review the estate by simply opening up a larger amount of the building and will support the reoccupation strategy as restrictions are lifted.
- 3.4 To ensure that there is a consistent approach to closure a close down checklist is being prepared led by CPM with input from across the Estate Management cohort which includes Strategic Asset Management, Facilities Management, Corporate Property Management and Health and Safety. Where buildings are closed, there will be a monitoring regime put in place which will vary for different properties, to ensure that they remain safe, secure and that any urgent maintenance is undertaken. Given the uncertainty around the length of time some buildings will be closed, in some cases it may be appropriate to drain water pipes and heating systems to avoid the potential for damage resulting from pipe bursts for example. This will be determined by the Estate Management Team
- 3.5 To support the city's response to the Covid-19 pandemic some of the Council's properties may need to be temporarily repurposed to support our vital services, the work of health services and wider government effort. This has already been the case at Unit 7 Logic Leeds which is one of the Council's investment properties and is temporarily being used to support food distribution to vulnerable groups and is earmarked for the storage of additional PPE. As requirements emerge, buildings within our estate will continue to be considered.

3.6 It is recognised that as we move into a recovery phase and the government begins to lift restrictions, it will not be possible or desirable to open up and reoccupy our entire estate over a short period of time. A staggered reopening strategy is therefore being considered by Strategic Asset Management which will allow buildings to be recommissioned and reoccupied on a phased basis to meet service delivery requirements, manage resource availability and comply with all Government instructions. This will be subject to a future decision.

4. Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 To define the lists set out in the Appendices of this report, there has been extensive consultation with each Directorate through Corporate Asset Management Board to ensure that current service requirements are properly understood. These discussions will continue to determine whether any further building closures are required.

4.1.2 The Executive Member for Resources has been consulted on the proposals set out in this report and will be regularly updated with any further proposed estate changes.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

4.2.1 Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration in relation to our estate is considered as part of the Council's wider estate management and planning, and the Equality, Diversity, Integration and Cohesion impact assessment is appended to this report.

4.3 Council policies and the Best Council Plan

4.3.1 The proposals set out in the Best Council Plan speaks to both the Best City and Best Council ambitions and each of the Best City priorities. In particular the closure of parts of the estate which are not fully utilised supports the efficiency of the Council at this difficult time.

Climate Emergency

4.3.2 The temporary closure of buildings will allow heating systems to be switched off or set to frost settings, and other systems and lighting to be turned off or set to standby. This will reduce energy consumption and the Council's carbon footprint whilst our estate is not been fully utilised.

4.4 Resources, procurement and value for money

4.4.1 By temporarily closing buildings within our estate, the Council will be able to ensure that staffing pressures emerging through illness and self-isolation can be managed and that we can redirect resources to supporting the most vulnerable. In addition, the temporary close down of buildings will deliver small financial savings as energy usage is reduced.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

4.5.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

4.6 Risk management

4.6.1 The key risks are as follows:

4.6.2 Buildings remain open despite not being fully utilised compromising building security and staff safety. This is being managed through ongoing dialogue with Facilities Management, Directorates and individual services to understand building utilisation and opportunities for staff to work from other nearby buildings which are remaining operational.

4.6.3 Buildings are closed which are then required for service delivery or to support the city's Covid-19 response. Through ongoing consultation with Directorates and with partner organisations such as Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust, Leeds Community Healthcare Trust and third sector organisations, requirements can be reviewed and where necessary and appropriate buildings can be recommissioned and reopened.

4.6.4 Ongoing Building management and maintenance – Where buildings are managed by Facilities Management the ongoing monitoring and management of buildings which are closed is straight forward. However, there are many buildings which are service managed. Over the last two weeks information has been collated in relation to key holders to ensure that access can be obtained to properties if necessary for any urgent repairs, safety issues or statutory testing. However, in some cases key holders may not be local and this presents a risk. Further work is being undertaken to fully understand the situation and resolve any areas of risk identified.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The current unprecedented situation resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the Council must review its operational estate to ensure that it can be properly managed and appropriately utilised.

5.2 With input from each Directorate, the attached schedules have been prepared setting out the buildings to be temporarily closed and those remaining operational.

5.3 The estate will continually be reviewed to ensure that it remains appropriate and relevant over the coming weeks and months as the situation evolves and that it can support where required, the city's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.4 A plan for the staggered reopening phase will be prepared and will be subject to separate approvals.

6. Recommendations

6.1 That the Chief Officer for Asset Management Regeneration agrees the temporary closure of buildings outlined in Appendix 2 and notes that this list will remain under continual review.

7. Background documents¹

7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.