

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL JOINT PANEL – 17 JUNE 2009

REPORT BY THE SECRETARY OF THE STAFF SIDE

8(A) PROPOSED FLOOR PLANS FOR WALLFIELDS

WARD(S) AFFECTED: None

RECOMMENDATION – (A) a full risk assessment of the proposed floor plans for Wallfields is carried out before the plans are finalised; and

(B) full details of the space allocation for each zone are provided to the Local Joint Panel and all staff.

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 To bring to the attention of panel members possible health and safety and amenity concerns about the proposed floor plans and to seek reassurance that the plans will be thoroughly risk assessed before being approved.

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/Objectives

2.1 Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.

3.0 Background

3.1 UNISON was supplied with copies of the proposed floor plans for Wallfields on Wednesday 27 May and asked by the Programme Director to feed back initial thoughts once officers had had time to study and digest the information. The proposals were amendments to the original plans by Paragon after the company had been asked to adapt their original version to take into account the results of the staff consultation.

3.2 There are currently 211 employees based at Wallfields. The original proposals saw this number being increased to approximately 307

staff and the new revised plans (Appendix A, pages 8.04 - 8.06) show an increase of 57 employees to a total of 260 in the whole of the building. This is based on the assumption that some employees will be working from home.

4.0 Concerns about Space

- 4.1 The Staff Side is concerned that the space allocation per person with the increased numbers may lead to risks to the health and safety of employees as well as engendering a negative view of the Council. More detail is needed on the temporary relocation of staff to facilitate the refurbishment work.
- 4.2 Appendix B (pages 8.07 - 8.17) shows the first seven pages of a report prepared by IPD Occupiers with support from Ramidus Consulting on behalf of the Office of Government Commerce (OGC), (IPD Occupiers is the leading global expert in independent property performance measurement). The report is entitled "Efficiency Standards for Offices" and recommends a minimum standard of 10 square meters per person for new or refurbished offices.
- 4.3 Appendix C (pages 8.18 - 8.23) shows Paragon's space allocation of Wallfields as it is currently and as the changes were originally proposed. (The new space allocation has not yet been made available to the Staff Side). The old part of the building has not been included since the proposed changes do not significantly impact on staff. The proposed plans show that the space allocation ranges from as little as 4.2 square metres on the second floor to 5.1 on the ground floor and 5.5 square metres on the first floor. Even allowing for the fact that in the new part of the building the increased numbers in staff have gone down from 263 to 234, this will still be far below the required minimum standard.
- 4.4 The Staff Side also has concerns that there will be insufficient storage, given that a paperless office is still a very long way from becoming a reality and also that there is insufficient space for printers and photocopiers to meet service needs. At the same time it is surprising that HoS will be allocated large offices when some are open plan now. There is also some risk that the planned numbers of staff not requiring full desk allocation will not be achieved thus putting even more pressure on space.

5.0 Health and Safety Concerns

- 5.1 The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 cover a wide range of basic health, safety and welfare issues and apply to most workplaces. The minimum space requirement specified in these regulations is 11 cubic metres when the room is empty and does not allow for any furniture or other equipment to be included.
- 5.2 The regulations also cover issues such as ventilation, temperatures, lighting, cleanliness, workstations and seating, floors and traffic routes, sanitary and washing facilities, facilities for rest, including provision of facilities for pregnant women and nursing mothers. It is well known that Wallfields top floor becomes extremely hot during parts of the summer which has health and safety implications. It is understood that in spite of the extra numbers no special improvements in ventilation are planned. A more detailed list of what should be covered in a risk assessment is contained in Appendix D (pages 8.24 - 8.25).
- 5.3 Employees at East Herts would feel reassured knowing that a full risk assessment had been carried out prior to the proposals being approved and that concerns about space allocation were unfounded.

5.0 Consultation

- 5.1 Heads of Service have been consulted and UNISON is in the process of being consulted.

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Non-compliance with the Health and Safety Regulations could have serious consequences for a local authority.

7.0 Financial Implications

- 7.1 Unknown

8.0 Human Resource Implications

- 8.1 The proposals have implications for all staff.

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