Merton Civic Centre Accommodation Strategy

Merton Council 2014
Civic Centre Accommodation Strategy.

Overall Aim.

1. The Civic Centre is the focal point for Merton’s corporate office accommodation. Following a drive to rationalise space and release outlying premises, resources are being directed at bringing the building up to a standard to make it fit for purpose for the 21st Century.

2. The aim of the Civic Centre Accommodation Strategy is to outline clearly what these requirements are and develop a Premises Policy that considers how most effectively:-
   a. to allocate and manage space to maximise use of accommodation and fit with corporate goals to review assets;
   b. to link in with the principles and protocols of the flexible working programme; and
   c. to support service department accommodation requirements as defined in their Target Operating Models (TOMs).

Background.

3. A strategy was developed and implemented from 2003/4 to rationalise Merton’s corporate offices, by releasing underutilised outlying premises for disposal or re-use and concentrating staff and resources in the Civic Centre. A number of sites were vacated as part of this process: Russell Road; Chapel Orchard; Apollo House; Athena House; Worsfold House and Gifford House. A variety of different front line teams moved into the Civic Centre and now provide an operational service from the building.

4. Resources have been devoted to refurbishing the Civic Centre in recent years to support this process. This has included: significant upgrading of IT and cabling infrastructure; heating modifications; creation of fire lobbies; standardising furniture, desk layouts and office support space design; window and ceiling replacement; and refurbishment of Merton Junction as a multi-use flexible space. It is recognised that more work is required during 2014: completion of heating modifications, fire lobbies and refurbishment of some office space; lift refurbishment/replacement; and the introduction of more innovative design to support flexible working and break the link between the work station and the individual.

Long Term Strategy.

5. The long term strategy remains to rationalise Merton’s corporate office space, through the introduction of flexible working practices and more efficient allocation and use of accommodation and continued centralisation of back office functions. In addition to releasing underutilised outlying premises this will also mean assembling up to 2 full floors of vacant space within the Civic Centre in order to:-
a. let on a commercial basis to external organisations, primarily partners such as voluntary bodies, Police NHS etc.
b. respond to anticipated future pressure on accommodation, as a result of expanding service provision (e.g. Public Health) and/or new shared service proposals (HR, Business Continuity, Environmental Health) being hosted by Merton and resulting in increased floor space requirements.

Core Principles of Management/Design.

6. To use most effectively the accommodation at the Civic Centre a number of core areas need to be addressed, including the following:-
   a. Building capacity and management/control of space;
   b. Space standards – how to allocate Workstations and other types of accommodation;
   c. Use of meeting rooms, cellular offices and ancillary accommodation;
   d. Specialist space; and
   e. Approach to document management and filing.

Building Capacity

7. There are approximately 1,000 people based in the Civic Centre. The building’s maximum capacity at any one time: 1,400 people, is limited by the capacity of the fire escapes. However, a detailed utilisation survey carried out in Summer 2012 showed average desk occupancy of under 41%. Quarterly reviews of the building access control system demonstrate that 1,224 people used the building over the most recently reported period but desk utilisation figures have probably not changed since 2012.

8. The accommodation strategy aims to deliver different types of space managed and allocated to allow the building to be used to maximum effect. A building that can accommodate 1,400 people at any one time should be able to ‘serve’ considerably more who are based there but working flexibly with more innovative design and use of space. A target figure of 1,680 (or 120% of maximum capacity) would be reasonable and could continue to be measured through the building access control system.

9. To support this overall goal, performance targets will be set for increased utilisation of space (to be measured by an annual survey):-
   a. 2013/14 – 45% average space utilisation
   b. 2014/15 – 50% average space utilisation
   c. 2015/16 – 55% average space utilisation
d. 2016/17 – 60% average space utilisation  
e. 2017/18 – 65% average space utilisation

10. These targets will aim to achieve industry best practice standards and be kept under review as part of the roll-out of the Flexible Working Programme to ensure that they are sufficiently challenging.

11. The proposed roll out plan for the Flexible Working programme is attached as Appendix 1. It is anticipated that it will take approximately two years to complete.

**Space Standards.**

12. A standardised office layout has been successfully introduced to the Civic Centre in recent years. A maximum capacity achievable in this way on a typical floor is 110 workstations as shown at Appendix 2. Typical current layouts use relatively generous 1600 desks and provide a space standard of 11 sq metre per person. This compares with the British Council for Offices Best Practice guide, which recommends 10 sq m per person as an overall norm.

13. Future layouts will continue to be based upon this basic space efficient model but the introduction of flexible working also requires the implementation of other types of space and furniture solutions: e.g. soft seating and ad hoc meeting areas, benching etc. to create environments where staff choose the setting to suit the activity and which foster more collaborative team and project-based working. Appendix 3 is an example of a proposed layout for this type of space to be implemented on the 5th floor of the building.

14. There must be clearly defined criteria about space allocation. As part of the introduction of flexible working allocation of desks within team areas should be based upon need. Each job role will be categorised as:-

   a. Office-based task worker  
b. Office-based Flexible Worker (Default)  
c. Field-based worker  
d. Contractual Homeworker.

15. Allocation of workstations to teams to be assessed on the type of roles within the team. The organisation to target an overall ratio of 7 desks: 10 staff. Ratios to be as follows:-

   a. Office-based task worker - 1:1  
b. Office-based Flexible Worker - 7:10  
c. Field-based worker - 1:5  
d. Contractual Homeworker - no office based desk.
16. To make this type of allocation effective it will be supported by an internal charging mechanism to be agreed with finance based upon a core cost with a variable charge for accommodation used. If services pay a ‘rental’ for each workstation they occupy this will act as a hard incentive to minimise their space allocation. ‘Neutral Zones’ will also be created between team areas providing unallocated hot desking to be used on either a 1st come 1st serve basis or bookable.

17. Workstyle categories would also determine allocation of IT:-
   a. Office-based task worker - Wyse terminal or fixed pc
   b. Office-based Flexible Worker – Wyse terminal or laptop
   c. Field-based worker – laptop/tablet
   d. Contractual Homeworker - laptop.

18. All space allocation, office moves and purchase of furniture will continue to be managed and co-ordinated by corporate Facilities Management. Space requirements should be considered as part of the roll-out of flexible working. However, ‘business as usual’ requests for growth and change will also need to be managed by Facilities and should be discussed in the first instance with Head of FM or the appropriate departmental manager.

19. Staff are currently largely still tied to desks and space. The vision for the future is for individuals to work in space appropriate for the task they are performing; for teams to be less ‘territorial’ about accommodation; and when moves are required they will take their files and specialist equipment with them and leave behind desks and I.T.

20. All teams will be encouraged to implement a clear desk policy to allow even desks allocated to individuals to be used by others when the ‘owner’ is away from their workbase. All workstations to be left completely empty at the end of each working day.

Specialist Space.

21. The standard layout will only fit part of the organisation and space will also still need to be allocated for specialist activities in various parts of the building. These include services to support the democratic process and operational 24/7 services, including parking and CCTV. As far as possible it is intended to consolidate this type activity on the 1st floor.

22. Additionally, although clearly an integral part of the Civic Centre, Merton Link is considered to be out of scope for the purposes of this accommodation strategy because it is specialist space that is being considered as part of the Customer Contact Programme.
Meeting Rooms.

23. A suitable mix of informal break breakout and formal meeting spaces need to be provided. The Civic Centre already contains a range of meeting space including: Council Chamber and formal Committee Rooms and meeting rooms on every office floor. As part of the previous refurbishment works a larger number of meeting rooms were created by turning every corner of each floor into either 1 or 2 offices. The full range of meeting rooms is shown in Appendix 4.

24. Unbookable/ ad hoc space is also available in Merton Junction and 1st floor coffee shop in Merton link. Staff need to consider confidentiality and security issues when using this type of space, particularly the 1st floor coffee shop which is open to the public.

25. Currently, most meeting rooms are no longer exclusively for the use of individual teams and are bookable by all through ‘outlook’. However, meeting space should be managed more effectively as a corporate resource, with FM taking responsibility for fitting out and furnishing rooms to a consistent standard in terms of décor, AV equipment, furniture etc and ensuring that these rooms are cleaned, monitored regularly and remain fit for purpose.

26. Room bookings are also not currently controlled or managed in any meaningful way. There are no limits on advance bookings or any means of preventing failure to turn up causing wastage and frustration. Although anecdotal evidence suggests staff often struggle to book rooms, the 2012 utilisation survey gave a figure of under 26% actual occupation.

27. LBM needs to invest in a bespoke booking system to maximise the use of space:-

   a. enable rooms that are not used to be returned to the booking system;
   b. the potential to charge for ‘no shows’ on meeting room bookings;
   c. automatically direct staff to book rooms of an appropriate size; and
   d. enable staff to book hot desking.

28. To support the effective use of meeting rooms a set of housekeeping rules are also proposed around the management and use of space. A draft ‘meeting room protocol’ is attached as Appendix 5.
Cellular Offices

29. There are currently approximately 25 cellular offices allocated to individual officers at Head of Service/Assistant Director level and above. Flexible Working principles suggest allocation should be based upon a strong business need for confidentiality rather than status. It might even challenge altogether the idea that managers require a cellular office, which is becoming much rarer in many workplaces. Corporate Services is taking a lead in this respect with some senior managers volunteering to release their offices to be used as meeting space as part of the Flexible Working roll-out. If the existing situation is retained elsewhere then a culture of making space available to use as ad hoc meeting rooms when the occupants are away from the office should be encouraged as a minimum.

Ancillary/Shared Space

30. As part of the standardisation of accommodation within the Civic Centre, ancillary space has already been reviewed within the building. Each floor already has a standard office support area. They include recycling and confidential waste bins; Multi-Functional Devices (MFDs), providing photocopier, scanning and printers. All of these are installed and managed by FM.

31. Kitchens have also been created on each floor, including large “American style” fridges with ample room for staff to store their consumables in a clearly identified manner; water coolers and water heaters; microwaves; and seating areas with sufficient capacity to cope with the lunch time rush. With these facilities available and the increasing expectation that shared workspace will become the norm, staff should be encouraged to eat cooked food away from desks within these kitchen areas or Merton Junction.

Filing/Storage Issues.

32. Space for storage is at a premium within the Civic Centre. Use of paper based processes and records should therefore be kept to the absolute minimum. There is no central filing facility and each team controls and manages its own storage requirements.

33. A key principle to file management is to retain files under the following categories:

   a. Required frequently or immediately,
   b. Required in a short timescale that can be planned,
   c. Required for statutory purposes,
   d. Required for long term purposes.
34. All teams to review regularly their wider business storage requirements and scan or archive files where appropriate. Office storage to be allocated based on need aiming to achieve a maximum average storage of 2 linear metre per FTE staff (3 linear metres = 1 low level storage unit).

35. Storage types to be standard desk height and high level storage cupboards/units [latter located only against interior walls in order not to block light] and desk height book cases within the general open plan office environment.

36. Each staff member will also be allocated a dedicated pedestal or locker/hotbox for personal storage to be assessed on the type of roles within the team as follows:-
   a. Office-based task worker - fixed desk pedestal
   b. Office-based Flexible Worker – hot box/locker
   c. Field-based worker – hot box/locker
   d. Contractual Homeworker - no office based personal storage.

37. A back scanning programme will need to be introduced linked to a new Electronic Document Record Management (EDRMS) system. An estimated 10 million pages of A4 need to be scanned as part of this project.

38. Teams also need to archive documents rather than keep paper files on site. Existing arrangements at Garth Road are managed in-house by FM supplemented by a contract with an external supplier (Wincanton). This will be extended and renegotiated to provide a more consistent and secure approach to archive management and allow the vacation and reuse of the Garth Road premises. All archive costs to be funded by departments rather than corporately and all files to have review and destruction dates rather than be retained indefinitely. This externalisation of the service and ‘above the line’ charging should help to drive behaviour change and encourage teams to reduce costs by managing records and information in accordance with corporate data retention policies.

Car Parking

39. Parking space within the Civic Centre is extremely limited. Very few bays are dedicated and access is restricted without guaranteeing a space to:-
   - Councillors, Directors and Assistant Directors.
   - Staff with specific disability or medical requirements, where assessed by HR and Occupational Health as needing temporary parking reviewable on a regular basis; and
- Some dedicated bays for specialist and contract vehicles, including disabled bays, MASCOT, Traffic Enforcement and pool car vehicles.

40. To support flexible working 6 spaces are marked as ‘red bays’, which are available as 1 hour parking primarily for peripatetic front-line staff. These are monitored and enforced by the on-site security team. However, to accommodate the anticipated increasing numbers of staff using the Civic Centre it is recommended to increase the number of these short term spaces to 12 and keep these arrangements under review. Additionally, FM will actively work with the E&R Parking team to identify the on-street and off-street opportunities and alternatives in Morden and with the Future Merton team identify and promote amongst staff alternatives to car usage.