

RE-DESIGNING TAUNTON OFFICE ACCOMMODATION: BUSINESS CASE

Introduction to the proposal

Staff will be aware that we have two office bases in Taunton - County Hall and Deane House. Recent occupancy data shows that between these two sites there is an over-supply of office accommodation – more desks than are currently being used - which is not sustainable in the current financial emergency and in light of creating a smaller, leaner council in the future.

We have received enquiries from external organisations who are interested in renting the first and second floors at Deane House. We need to consider this in detail before we can make a decision, but if it is agreed, Council staff working in those areas would need to be relocated to County Hall.

As proposals develop, we will consult with Trade Union representatives regarding impact on contractual work locations and consult with affected staff on any proposals. We will also ensure that all staff are able to input in the proposals as well as the design and use of our future working spaces.

BACKGROUND AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

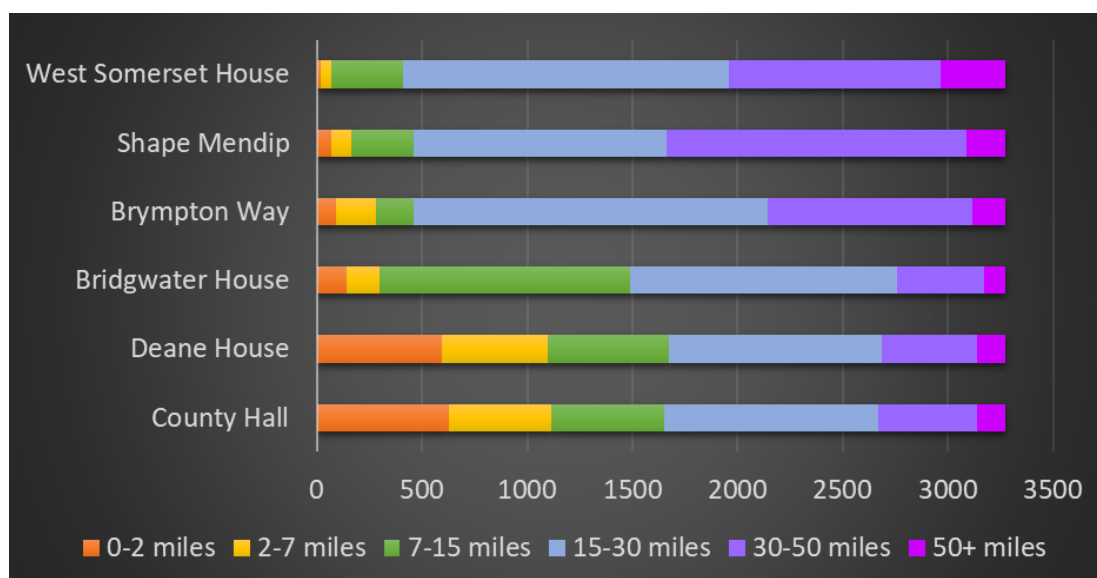
Organisational re-design, workforce and workspace context

- 1.1.1 Somerset Council has commenced a whole council transformation programme which will fundamentally change the Council. As part of this programme, the Council will be developing a new operating model and organisational structure and will seek to reduce the size of its workforce through technological change, service re-design and devolution, and a comprehensive redundancy and restructuring exercise. The development of ways of working and a rationalised property estate for the Council comes under the Innovation and Change workstream within the Council's Improvement and Transformation Programme, and decisions on workplace locations, work styles and the use of office space will be taken as part of a re-design of the Council's operating model. This proposal is being brought forward ahead of those wider decisions because of an income generation opportunity that cannot be deferred. It must, therefore, be capable of fitting with a potential range of operating model outcomes.
- 1.1.2 The Council owns four large office buildings in Taunton – A, B and C Blocks at the County Hall campus (on the southwest edge of the town centre) and Deane House to the north of the town centre. Block C of the County Hall campus has been emptied and is in the process of being put to market; capacity available at the other three buildings significantly exceeds usage (at an average busy time, c. 400 staff are utilising three sites that have capacity for c. 1,400 staff).

The Taunton office bases were designed and sized for pre-Covid patterns of working; the interior of B Block dates from a refurbishment programme which was originally designed in 2010 (Deane House from 2019, and A-Block from 2018).

1.1.3 Somerset Council currently has a total of c. 3,300 workers with a contractual work base at one of the six main campuses in the county. Chart 1 below shows that a significant proportion of these workers live in or near to Taunton compared to the location of other office workplaces – over half of the office-based workforce living within 15 miles of a Taunton office, with a significant number living within walking (0-2 miles, >500 staff) or cycling (0-7 miles, >1000 staff) distance of Deane House or County Hall.

Chart 1: Office-based workforce – distance of home address from selected office sites



1.1.4 B Block and Deane House are part-let to public partners and other organisations; A Block has no tenants and was closed during the winter of 2023-24 to save energy costs in response to the Council financial emergency. Table 2 below shows the relative space and capacity available to Somerset Council at each of these buildings, alongside desk occupancy data taken from recent surveys. This table shows the situation as it is now, prior to the impact of the Improvement and Transformation programme on workforce numbers and ways of working, and prior to any re-modelling / re-design of office space to reflect more dynamic post-Covid ways of working. There are approximately 2,100 staff who have a contractual work base at one of the three buildings in Table 1 below; it is notable that even in busy periods, we are observing that fewer than 20% of these staff are occupying desks at their work base at a given point.

Table 2: capacity and usage of Taunton offices (C Block excluded)

Appendix A

	Net int. area (m ²)	Meeting rooms		Desk capacity*	Desk occupancy Sept. 23		Desk occupancy Jan. 24	
		Large	Small		Average	Busy	Average	Busy
A Block	3,950	6	12	460	100	150	-	-
B Block	5,030	9	28	720 [#]	120	170	160	240
Deane House	2,460	4	12	290 [#]	40	60	60	110
TOTAL	11,440	19	52	1,470	260	380	220	350

**desk capacity and desk occupancy does not take account of usage and capacity within meeting rooms and is based on current office layouts, configured prior to the impact of the COVID pandemic on office working patterns and the use of space.*

[#]capacity includes the 2nd floor of Deane House and the 3rd floor of B Block, currently not utilised.

- 1.1.5 The floor space available to Somerset Council at Deane House is approximately half the size of the space available at B Block, with fewer than half of the number of meeting rooms. The design and layout of the Deane House space supports a low-density occupation, with large breakout and informal working areas and space between working areas. Deane House is a popular work base for staff, evidenced in part by an increase in use during the period A Block has been mothballed, and also from feedback received by our facilities teams. However, the net internal area available to Somerset Council at Deane House is unlikely to be large enough to support collaboration and office working requirements for the workforce currently based across the two Taunton campuses, even in a scenario where the number of staff reduced significantly. Whilst a higher density occupation could provide sufficient desk space for c. 300 staff, availability of additional collaboration / meeting space is likely to be insufficient to meet needs. Our conclusion to this analysis is that an alternative approach of focussing office accommodation on the Deane House site (and moving all Somerset Council staff out of County Hall) would require some teams / staff to relocate collaboration and workspace to other office bases elsewhere in the county.
- 1.1.6 In contrast the floor space available to Somerset Council in B Block is likely to exceed current requirements for desk space without any requirement to use space at Deane House or A Block. However, availability of additional collaboration / meeting space would likely be under pressure and some re-configuration will be required to meet current needs. The recent winter arrangements (involving the closure of A Block and the third floor of B Block) reduced space available at the County Hall campus significantly, and this has not been popular with some staff. Overall usage of office space in Taunton appears to have reduced during this period – this evidence, together with anecdotal feedback, indicates that some staff have chosen not to come into the office because of their experience of the working environment, or difficulty booking desks and appropriate collaborative space. Meeting rooms, in particular, have been heavily over-subscribed during the period that the third floor of B Block has been taken out of use.
- 1.1.7 Feedback from Equalities Groups has highlighted the challenges being experienced by neurodivergent employees in busier office environments – concerns about struggling to find quieter spaces to work, increased noise, not ‘being able to escape the noise’ and increased visual distractions were raised. An initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed to support this business case (see Appendix A), highlighting that changes to workplace location may have more significant impacts for staff with certain protected characteristics.

1.1.8 Finally, the cultural and identity associations of the respective Taunton campuses is an important contextual factor. County Hall is associated with the former County Council, the largest of the precursor authorities and any relocation of staff to County Hall is likely to be perceived by some staff (inside and outside Taunton) as further evidence of a ‘takeover’ of District Councils through the LGR process. Deane House is the contractual work base for former Somerset West and Taunton staff working in Taunton, with County Hall occupancy being dominated by former County Council staff. Continuing with these legacy office working arrangements in the same locality is likely to impact on the development of new team identities for teams and service areas as they integrate.

1.2 Somerset Council’s Asset Management Strategy and Property Rationalisation Programme

1.2.1 Somerset Council agreed an Asset Management Strategy in February 2023, which sets out six strategic objectives:

- The Council’s estate is financially sustainable, efficient and effective.
- Assets are fit for purpose, safe and compliant.
- Assets address the Climate Emergency.
- The Council’s estate is used to meet housing and care needs, with an emphasis on social housing.
- The Council’s estate supports prosperity and economic growth.
- Address the growing challenges in the Council’s school buildings estate.

1.2.2 A combination of the dramatic changes to the way offices are used in the wake of the Covid pandemic, and the bringing together of 5 legacy council office estates into Somerset Council means that the main focus of the property rationalisation work has been on the Council’s office estate, together with related customer service sites. Phase one of this programme has focussed on the rationalisation of specific sites in Yeovil, West Somerset, and Taunton – this phase is moving into delivery and will include the sale of C Block, County Hall, as well as enabling the disposal of 6 other sites. A second phase of the programme is being taken forward jointly with One Public Estate partners, focussing on more effective use and rationalisation of office properties across the Health and Care system.

1.2.3 To support the wider analysis of property rationalisation opportunities the Council's Strategic Asset Management team have assessed the potential to sell the County Hall site (in whole or parts) and the Deane House campus, with support from a leading agent with strong expertise in the relevant markets. Somerset Council has inherited long term commitments to existing tenants at both Deane House and B Block, with part of each site occupied under lease or licence arrangements that have 7 more years to run at B Block, and over 20 more years to run at Deane House. These commitments act as significant constraints to development of the sites. Whilst there are also constraints on the sale of A and C blocks, there are no incumbent tenants in these buildings and, if Somerset Council can vacate fully, a sale is more likely to be achieved.

1.2.4 Property condition and repair liabilities have also been assessed as part of the property rationalisation programme; relative condition is a key factor in decisions about retaining or disposing of property. C Block in the County Hall campus would require investment to return to operational use. A summary assessment of condition and near-term repair liabilities on the other three buildings is set out below:

- Deane House was constructed in 1987 and renovated extensively in 2019; as such the building is in good condition overall, with a new heating system.
- A Block was constructed in 1935, with extensive renovations and repairs in 2019-20. In particular, new heating and M&E systems have been installed throughout, with repairs and maintenance carried out on the roof. However, as a listed building of an older construction type, A Block is likely to have higher medium / long term maintenance costs – with the roof, basement and windows presenting particular areas of risk. Modular buildings adjacent to A Block (which have been used most recently for meeting room capacity) are end of life and will require replacement or demolition in the near-term; some drainage repairs are also required to adjacent parking areas.
- B Block was constructed in 1958 and the majority of the building was extensively renovated in 2021, with a comprehensive renewal of windows and external fabric, a new roof overlay, and replacement of major M&E components in most parts. This renovation excluded the ground floor parts of the building, where some further investment would be required to optimise the former staff restaurant space.

1.2.5 In summary, strategic asset management considerations would support the retention of Deane House or B Block from the perspective of condition liabilities and the potential for disposal. Being part let, both of these sites are likely to be difficult to sell, but both also benefit from recent investment in building fabric and systems with lower maintenance liabilities in the near term as a result. C Block is entirely unsuitable for retention (and has current interest from developers), and A Block is likely to have more appeal to prospective purchasers and carries a more significant maintenance liability risk. This business case does not consider the future of A Block – information set out here is for strategic context only and any decisions about the future of A Block will be taken in due course.

1.3 Somerset Council's Climate Emergency and Decarbonisation commitments

1.3.1 The declaration of a climate emergency by Somerset local authorities in February 2019 commits the Council to taking actions to reduce carbon emissions in its own operations, including its offices and operational estate. As part of this commitment, significant investment in estate decarbonisation has been delivered by the precursor councils prior to vesting day, and by Somerset Council over the last 11 months, including decarbonisation projects at Deane House and B Block, County Hall.

1.3.2 Both Deane House and B Block, County Hall are energy efficient, largely decarbonised sites having had the benefit of significant investment. A and C Blocks would require significant further investment to decarbonise – with listing constraints and current technology, heat decarbonisation of A Block is unlikely to be viable for a number of years.

- Deane House has an EPC 'C' rating and is predominantly heated by electric heat pumps with only minor use of fossil fuel heating for hot water. Rooftop solar panels generate an estimated 73 kWp of renewable energy on-site (approx. 13% of consumption on the site). Further improvements to insulation would be required to decarbonise the site completely.
- Following a major investment in insulation and heat decarbonisation in 2021-22, B Block, County Hall is due a new EPC shortly. Air source heat pumps and heat recovery systems provide low carbon heating to the upper floors of the building, supplemented by gas heating on the lower floors (which would be replaced by electric alternatives when they reach end of life). Rooftop solar panels generate an estimated 63 kWp of renewable energy on-site per annum (approx. 6% of consumption for the building). Improvements to glazing and other insulation on the ground floor and the B/C link would be required to optimise the energy efficiency of the building, requiring further investment. There is likely to be a reasonable invest-to-save payback on a further option to complete the roll-out of LED lighting throughout the building.

- 1.3.3 Different disposal and development strategies would have different impacts on global heating. Demolition and rebuild strategies carry a significant cost in emissions terms, and the re-use and refurbishment of buildings as an alternative to demolition and re-build reduces the impact of embodied carbon.
- 1.3.4 Replacing vehicular journeys through the promotion of public transport, walking and cycling is another key consideration to support the council's Climate Emergency Strategy. Both of the Taunton campuses are well situated for public transport networks, and have bicycle parking, shower and drying room facilities to support active travel. A large proportion of Somerset's working age population live within walking or cycling distance of one of the campuses.

2 STRATEGIC CASE - is there a compelling reason to do this, are business risks acceptable?

The proposal has some benefits from a workforce, asset management and financial perspective, but it is not without risk, and is not considered to be a clear-cut decision. This section sets out the main benefits of the proposal, including headline financial benefits and costs, as well as the risks associated with implementing the proposal. A more detailed economic appraisal is set out in section 3 below, which includes consideration of alternative options.

2.1 Non-financial benefits

The main benefits for Somerset Council are set out below:

2.1.1 Workforce & cultural benefits

- Re-thinking the use of space and reconfiguring B Block to support modern ways of working – benefiting those who are currently based at B Block, as well as staff based elsewhere who come to Taunton for meetings and collaborative working. Moving forward with the proposal would set a medium-term strategy for Taunton office accommodation and provide income to fund essential equipment, creating a business case for remodelling and re-configuration.
- Supporting the desired culture of “one team”, in line with our values, by enabling teams who are currently based across two sites to be co-located and to experience the same working environment and facilities. Remodelling space at B Block (in particular, the creating of more informal team collaboration space to support hybrid working models) will also support team working and development.
- The B Block site has a number of facilities which benefit the workforce, including a ‘changing places’ standard toilet for disabled staff and visitors, a secure bike compound and shower facilities, a drying room, and more flexibility for multi-purpose wellbeing rooms.

2.1.2 Strategic Asset Management benefits

- In the short and medium-term the proposal reduces facilities management overheads and brings in revenue to support investment in B Block to make it more fit for purpose. It also sets a position for the medium term which will support the implementation and development of wider strategies for other parts of the County Hall campus (including the sale of C Block, and the development of an options appraisal on the future of A Block).
- In the medium to longer term the capacity and flexibility provided by the County Hall campus, and the retention of Deane House as a yield generating site, gives flexibility for our accommodation and co-location strategies to adapt to the outcomes of ongoing Organisational Design work. This flexibility could also support opportunities for co-location with other public sector partners in Taunton, if there is a business case for this. The County Hall campus provides space for growth if required – within B Block or into A Block if needed. Relocation to a smaller Taunton footprint at Deane House would remain feasible in the medium term.

2.1.3 Other non-financial benefits

- The proposal fits well with a wider estate decarbonisation strategy, by retaining two sites which have the benefit of significant investment in decarbonisation measures, and enabling the disposal of sites that would be very difficult, and probably unviable for the council to decarbonise.
- Co-location on one site, with reconfigured workspaces that are more fit for purpose, is likely to improve workforce productivity by enabling more convenient, ready opportunities for in-person collaboration where appropriate.
- The proposal is an enabler for other aspects of consolidation which are likely to deliver further savings, but which require a decision which sets direction for the medium term. Somerset Council is currently operating two data centres in Taunton – if the proposal is implemented, this infrastructure would have a basis for moving forward with consolidation.

2.2 **Financial benefits and costs**

The proposal would deliver an estimated net revenue saving in the range of £500,000 - £700,000 annually for 5 years, with forecast investment of c. £280,000 required to fund implementation, remodelling and business change costs (which would be financed from the income received in the first 6-7 months of occupation). The saving would be available to support the 2025/26 budget gap as an MTFP saving proposal.

2.3 **Risks**

The proposal has been developed by Strategic Asset Management and Workforce staff, with support from IT. The principle residual risks associated with the proposal are as follows:

2.3.1 Risk 1 – Risk that the proposed solution does not provide fit for purpose office accommodation.

The recent winter working arrangements in County Hall demonstrated the need to provide office accommodation which has a range of different working environments to support employees in quiet working, confidential discussions, and larger collaboration; and which also meets the particular needs of a diverse workforce. In a new post-Covid, hybrid working paradigm office space is increasingly used for more occasional collaboration, but also needs to provide adequate space for staff who cannot work from home, or who prefer to work in an office location. The current layout of B Block (which excludes currently unused space on the 3rd floor of B Block) does not meet these requirements. There is a risk that the additional space on B3 may not be sufficient to support effective office layouts, or that insufficient time and thought is given to developing an effective remodelling solution.

Mitigations:

- Engaging with staff to co-produce designs and layout options for the reconfiguration of B Block, and the use of external 'critical friend' support which is funded in the business case.
- The use of A Block for temporary decant space, to provide more time to design and reconfigure space in B Block.
- The provision of some funding for investment in new furniture and equipment, where this is essential to develop effective working space.

In relation to Risk 2 below, and subject to Trade Union consultation, the proposal within this business case would see Deane House based staff relocating to B Block, County Hall to enable an income generation opportunity to share space with public partners. A Block at County Hall would be used on a transitional basis to enable the various team moves required associated with project implementation and would be retained by the Council pending further review.

2.3.2 Risk 2 – Risk that we are unable to obtain collective agreement with Trade Unions on the work base change for those with Deane House as their contractual work base.

Specific work locations are currently a contractual right for some staff based at the Deane House site. There are currently 282 staff (based on SAP data) who have Deane House as their work location and work is ongoing to determine the nature of relevant contractual terms (which vary across this group).

Mitigations:

- To enter into meaningful consultation with the Trade Unions as early as possible, allowing time for them to consult with their members and engage in a co-production approach.
- To directly engage with affected staff with clear and transparent messages around the drivers, benefits and implications of the proposed move.
- To work with Trade Unions and affected staff on the approach to redesigning Block B to ensure the optimum working environment, taking account of any financial constraints.
- Minimising and mitigating any real or perceived detriment – car parking will be a particular area of focus here and options will be developed with Trade Union input at an early stage.

2.3.3 Risk 3 – Negative impact on morale and performance of affected staff/teams caused by the level of disruption.

The proposed move is due to happen at the same time as the start of whole organisational change/restructuring process, and the cumulative impact of uncertainty and change presents a risk to performance, motivation and morale.

Mitigations:

- As with the mitigations for risks 1 and 2, engaging and consulting with staff in a co-production approach, and providing clear and transparent messages throughout will help to mitigate this risk.
- Early communication of the proposal to staff has been agreed with Trade Unions.

2.3.4 Risk 4 – Risk that the proposal impacts on staff with protected characteristics.

Mitigations:

- To have a clearly defined process to identify, capture, collate and manage reasonable adjustments required for affected staff, and a timely programme of communications messaging to manage staff expectations and to mitigate anxiety where possible.
- Engagement with principal equalities and diversity networks on the approach to re-designing B Block
- An initial equalities impact assessment accompanies this business case, containing a full list of mitigating actions. The impact assessment and table of actions have been developed in conjunction with the Council's Equalities in Employment Officer and with the benefit of feedback from equalities and diversity groups.
- The impact assessment and action plan will be continually reviewed through consultation, design and implementation.

2.3.5 Risk 5 – insufficient capacity to deliver proposal effectively / on time

Workforce, project and assets staff are under significant pressure to deliver the transformation programme and wide-ranging asset devolution, disposal and property rationalisation activities. Facilities management teams are also under pressure, with a major system implementation and the implementation of new fire regulations and Martyn's Law. There is a risk that these teams do not have the necessary capacity to deliver consultation, change management, relocation and interior layout re-configuration activities effectively. The opportunity presented is time-bound, and consultation, decision making, and implementation phases will have to be delivered at pace.

Mitigations:

- Capacity within the property rationalisation programme team will be prioritised for this project; some Facilities Management resource can also be freed up by re-prioritising other tasks. To supplement available capacity, an allowance for additional HR, FM and project staff has been provided for within the business case.

- Timescales allow sufficient time for meaningful consultation with union representatives and staff; use of A Block for decant will give more time for further engagement and a co-production approach to remodelling, as well as implementation.

2.3.6 Risk 6 – proposal impacts on the delivery of wider transformation savings.

Consultation on the proposals, and any subsequent implementation, will be disruptive and create additional work for the managers and some staff in affected teams (as well as for workforce and project functions that are critical to the wider transformation programme). There is a risk that attention and resource could be diverted away from the delivery of other savings.

Mitigations:

- The use of A Block will enable a more straightforward initial relocation and allow more time for the more complicated work required to integrate teams and re-design office workspace and how it is used.
- Funding for additional HR and project staff (to supplement existing resources) is included within the business case.
- Early and clear communication of the proposals, alongside robust stakeholder engagement, will support managers and staff to be 'change ready'.

3 ECONOMIC CASE - does the proposal deliver value for money?

3.1 Options appraisal

Three other options for the reconfiguration of Taunton office accommodation have been considered and assessed as part of the development of this business case.

3.1.1 Alternative Option 1 – do nothing – continue with staff based across two Taunton sites.

This option has the advantage of avoiding significant change and disruption at very challenging and difficult time, with the significant workforce relations risks involved. The re-design of office accommodation could be done at a later stage, enabling accommodation to be sized to take account of the size of the workforce following organisational redesign. However, it is not preferred because:

- The opportunity to bring the Taunton office-based workforce together onto a single campus would be delayed, which runs counter to the organisational value of working as 'one team'. There would be no strong financial business case for improving the quality of accommodation for staff based at B Block, which is likely to mean a continuation of the current, historic configuration (given the financial constraints the council is under).
- There is a current opportunity to reduce the net revenue cost of accommodation and bring in a saving to support the 2025/26 revenue budget gap which would be missed. Although it is possible that surplus space at Deane House could be rented at a later point, the market is very challenging and our experience of seeking potential tenants for sites in Taunton highlights

a risk that an opportunity to secure a tenant may not arise for a number of years.

- Further opportunities for consolidation and savings in IT infrastructure and facilities costs would be lost, or at least deferred for some time.

3.1.2 Alternative Option 2 – utilise Deane House alone for Taunton accommodation and relocate staff from County Hall to Deane House, Bridgwater House and other sites.

This option has the potential advantage of releasing the whole County Hall site for sale as a more meaningful parcel of development land, but only if the constraint of Somerset Council's current obligations to tenants of B Block can be overcome. Depending on the impact of organisational redesign on workforce office use in Taunton, it may be possible to implement this option at a later date – following the conclusion of the proposed 5-year licence period, or sooner by exercising a break option. However, it is not preferred at the current time because:

- There is insufficient space at Deane House for the current Taunton based workforce, particularly for collaboration & meetings. Current levels of workforce office use in Taunton would have to reduce to below 50% of those experienced in busy periods at present, with investment in the Deane House campus to create additional meeting room space.
- Unless workforce use reduces very significantly in the short term, staff work, and collaboration activity currently based in Taunton would need to be relocated to other sites in Somerset. The analysis set out in paragraph 1.1.3. above shows that this is likely to increase staff travel and therefore carbon emissions; staff who currently have the ability to walk or cycle to work are likely to have to use more expensive public transport or car travel. It would be more disruptive for staff than the preferred option.
- Whilst revenue operating costs could be reduced more significantly in the medium / longer term, there would be no reduction in operating cost in the short term as is the case with the preferred option. The sale of the County Hall site (particularly A and B Blocks) is likely to take a number of years to progress to completion, and the council would remain liable for operating costs until a sale concluded.
- Moving to a smaller Taunton office base may constrain opportunities for further rationalisation of sites outside of Taunton and would also constrain further income generation opportunities.

3.1.3 Alternative Option 3 – relocate all staff to a new site (lease or new build).

This option would involve a much higher level of capital or revenue investment which is not likely to be affordable, even when potential receipts from the sale of A and B Block and Deane House are taken into account. At this stage, in the context of the council's financial emergency it is not considered a viable option.

3.2 Economic appraisal of preferred option

The proposal is forecast to generate an increase in net annual revenue of between £500,000 - £700,000, with forecast investment of c. £280,000 required to fund implementation, remodelling and business change costs. This represents a payback period of 0.5 years or less. Deane House would move from a net cost position to a position where the building generated net income for Somerset Council.

4 COMMERCIAL CASE & VIABILITY - is the proposal viable? Would it lead to sub-optimal outcomes?

This section considers some specific operational issues to explain how certain business requirements will be addressed or investigated by the proposed programme.

4.1 Face to face customer services in Taunton

Deane House houses Somerset Council's main customer reception desk, and a number of interview and meeting rooms used by social care, housing and revenues and benefits services. The ground floor area of Deane House is not impacted by the proposals and these services would remain operational from Deane House, with some office space allocated to staff supporting the customer service operations also available for Somerset Council on the ground floor. Future options for the location of customer service operations in Taunton would be considered in a separate and subsequent exercise.

4.2 Children's Social Care – conferences and family time services

Children's Social Care operations have statutory requirements to hold formal case conference and review meetings, and to enable supervised 'family time' contact for looked after children and their families. Growth in demand over the past few years has put pressure on the family time services in particular, where demand now exceeds the capacity of their long-standing Taunton area base in Creech St. Michael. This service has been impacted by the reduction in meeting room capacity with the temporary, winter closure of A Block – options for providing suitable space in the short and longer term will be reviewed with the service during any implementation phase.

4.3 Democratic committee arrangements and collaboration space

The terms of the potential income generation opportunity would allow shared use (50% of the week) of the larger JMR meeting room and adjacent committee rooms. Options for hosting democratic meetings in Taunton would be assessed, with either A Block or Deane House the most likely options. The location of audio-visual equipment will be a key consideration, as well as the development of options for the A Block site. However, the proposals considered in this business case leave options open.

4.4 ICT infrastructure

Data centre and network infrastructure at Deane House would remain in place, and be accessible, through the licence period if required. The ICT team are implementing a programme to consolidate data centre infrastructure which would continue.

4.5 Digital mail and post operations

Digital mail and post operations at Deane House are based on the ground floor, but whilst the physical space is not impacted by the proposals there are likely to be indirect implications for this function which will need to be investigated. Options for change for post, print and digital mail functions in the Taunton area will be reviewed following the consultation period, with further, specific staff consultation if appropriate when proposals have been developed.