

Report to: **Scrutiny Committee**

Date of Meeting: 7 Feb 2019

Public Document: Yes

Exemption: None

Review date for release None



Agenda item: **9**

Subject: **EDDC Relocation – Knowle Contents Disposal**

Purpose of report: In response to a request from the Chair of Scrutiny, to advise committee members on the process of disposal of items from the Knowle prior to handover to PegasusLife for demolition.

Recommendation: **No recommendations.**

Reason for recommendation: N/A

Officer: Richard Cohen
Deputy Chief Executive

Financial implications: No additional finance comment is required.

Legal implications: The report raises no direct legal implications.

Equalities impact: Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk

Links to background information: • None.

Link to Council Plan: Relocation is a key project under the Council's priority of continuously improving to be an outstanding council.

Relocation is also a key element of the Council's Transformation Plan.

Report in full

East Devon District Council is in the final stages of leaving its Sidmouth offices in the Knowle Park and moving to Blackdown House in Honiton. A move of housing and benefits staff principally has already successfully happened in Nov 2017 to the refurbished Town Hall in Exmouth. Staff will move from Sidmouth to Honiton in three phases completing as of 11 Feb 2019 when the Honiton office will be fully operational.

The council then needs to hand over the Knowle at the earliest opportunity to PegasusLife so that they can pay the purchase price and commence their preparations for demolition and redevelopment. Prior to handover the council needs to clear the building once staff have departed.

It has been a complex, multi-site and multi-million pound project that is nearing completion. As part of that process and prior to the handover of the old office buildings to the developer, the council needs to clear the buildings. In total there are just over 2,600 separate items in the Knowle. The vast majority of these are office furniture: desks, chairs, cabinets etc of varying ages, condition and size. There are also a number of particular items of varying antiquity and value: these involve both furnishings and fixture and fittings. From a perspective of bulk disposal the estimated total weight of all these items is 45 metric tonnes. As with paper filing, the council has sought to minimise or avoid offsite storage as much as possible.

In May 2018 the Office Relocation Executive Group and Officer Working Party discussed the need to dispose of items at the Knowle and SMT took on the task of overseeing clearance arrangement with the detail to be worked out by the Relocation Team. The authority to dispose of the items exists within the Council Constitution and is delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive.

The Facilities Project Manager within the Relocation Team went on to investigate the options for disposal and reported back to SMT in September 2018 having made enquiries of a range of potential interested parties to test interest. These included local auction houses, clearance specialists, 2nd hand furniture sellers and also tested the interest of some not for profit groups and charities that sold on used furniture. SMT agreed a series of actions:

1. From the early days of the council's relocation plans Sidmouth Museum has made known its desire to re-home items including tiles and fireplaces and some Sidmouth and Knowle memorabilia. Similarly Sidmouth Town Council has previously made known their interest in some objects such as prints, photographs and the like. These items of particular relevance to the town and the history of the Knowle have therefore been earmarked for town council and museum. Similarly other items that EDDC is not taking to Blackdown House and that have significance to other places have been offered to be handed over eg a clock that once belonged to Honiton Rural District Council has been offered to Honiton Town Council. The large table in the members' area at the Knowle was offered to Exmouth Town Council as there was a view that it had a historical link to the town. Exmouth Town Council declined the offer of the table originally but did change their view just before Christmas 2018 and are now expected to take ownership of the table.
2. Valuers from multiple local auction houses were invited in to look over items, especially those expected to be of higher value, and give their estimates of values for the purposes of public auction. Six were asked and four responded. Their assessments were not overwhelming with the exception of a few of the more antiquated items such as a Victorian bookcase that were worth taking to auction. The vast majority of items were not of interest to the auction rooms. They also considered storage, transport and other costs as well as sale fees in their thinking.
3. For remaining items an opportunity was offered at SMT's behest for council staff and members to bid for items whether for practical or aesthetic reasons. These were items that had been attributed little or no sale value by the various professional auctioneers and ranged from standard office furniture items to cupboards, upholstered furnishings, tables, curtains for example. This element of the disposal process involves around seventy separate items and is likely to raise of the order of £2,000 for the Chairman's chosen charities.

Within this disposal process there was also the large meeting table in the members' area which was originally rejected by Exmouth town council, bid for by an elected member, but also then requested by Exmouth Town Council to put into storage and now remains in situ at the Knowle pending collection by the town council after the Knowle closes on Feb 11 2019.

4. As well as the disposal routes above The Relocation Team has also tested the interest of charitable organisations and clearance companies for the more generic items such as

desks, chairs, tables, shelving etc. Groups such as Action East Devon, Green Furniture Aid and Hospicare who are all either networked with voluntary groups or can sell furniture via charity outlets were asked whether they had an interest but the response has been largely muted.

The council was also approached by a few groups that we think were made aware via elected members. Their requests are mainly for desks, chairs and the like and have been noted.

5. When the council has vacated the Knowle then the Relocation Team will write out to town and parish councils with the remaining list asking them whether they have an interest in any items with the requirement that they transport said items away themselves. We will also be asking the councils if they are aware of and can contact local voluntary and charitable groups that might also be interested. Depending on the level of response the Relocation Team will arrange an open day, viewings or similar scale of access.

Whilst we will not be pricing the items, beneficiaries will be invited to donate to the Chairman's chosen charities.

6. It is likely that there will still remain some bulk of furniture still to be disposed of and we are also in contact with specialist clearance companies to remove the remainder for re-sale and/or recycling.

We hope that the process will secure some thousands of pounds for charity. In the grand scale of relocation this is a minor part in terms of value and process but nevertheless clearance of the building needs to happen completely and within a window of time.