

**Forward Plan Reference number:** Not applicable

<b>Report title:</b> Drawdown from Health and Safety Reserve: Implementing measures to reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission in ECC core office estate	
<b>Report to:</b> Cllr Chris Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance	
<b>Report author:</b> Paul Crick, Director, Performance, Investment & Delivery	
<b>Date:</b> 19 June 2020	<b>For:</b> Decision
<b>Enquiries to:</b> Ben Finlayson <a href="mailto:ben.finlayson@essex.gov.uk">ben.finlayson@essex.gov.uk</a> or Paul Crick <a href="mailto:paul.crick@essex.gov.uk">paul.crick@essex.gov.uk</a>	
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex	

## **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1 It is proposed to implement a series of measures in the main ECC office locations to make them safe for staff who have an essential need to return to the workplace during the recovery phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. This report seeks approval to draw down the funding required to deliver these measures.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 Agree to the drawdown of £308,120 from the Health and Safety reserve to enable the implementation of measures required in main ECC office locations to reduce the risk of COVID-19 to staff.

## **3. Summary of issue**

- 3.1 The vast majority of ECC staff have been working from home since the national COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were introduced.
- 3.2 As lockdown restrictions are being eased and more children are returning to schools, the Council has identified an essential need for some of its staff to return to offices to be able to continue crucial work and deliver key services effectively.
- 3.3 A Property Coordination Group has been set up to determine how the return of staff to offices can be done in a safe and measured way to prevent the spread of the virus and protect staff. Members of this group include Facilities, Property, Health and Safety, Public Health and HR professionals.
- 3.4 The Property Coordination Group has reviewed and considered the relevant government guidance and has carried out a thorough risk assessment that covers ECC office space in the following locations: County Hall, Ely House, Goodman House, Magnet House, Stanwell House, Essex House, Causeway

House (ECC-let office space) and Freebournes Road. It has identified a series of measures to be implemented in these locations to make them safe in the context of COVID-19.

3.5 The measures to be implemented consist of the following:

Category	Item	Initial Cost	6 Month Total
Cleaning	Desk cleaning provisions for staff to use in order to facilitate desk sharing across the office buildings (spray bottles, paper towels, cleaning fluid)	£800	£6,900
	Additional cleaning weekdays of office areas by Mitie – focussing on high touch locations. Excludes additional consumables. Assumes staff availability.	£0	£108,000
	Specialist clean of Remembrance Square entrance at County Hall	£2,800	£2,800
Physical measures	Installation of extensive signage across the office buildings, allowance for replacement costs also identified	£6,500	£7,500
	Desk screens at most locations in order to deliver sufficient desk space.	£59,000	£59,000
	Desk screen contingency allowance	£20,000	£20,000
	Miscellaneous items to facilitate measures (consumables)	£2,800	£2,800
Personal Hygiene	Paper towels for toilets and meeting rooms	£500	£21,120
	Hand Sanitizer and dispensers. Usage estimated based on predicted occupancy. Initial 3 months' supply is £55,000.  Prices may reduce over time.	£55,000	£80,000
<b>Total Estimated Costs</b>		<b>£147,400</b>	<b>£308,120</b>

- 3.6 The implementation of these measures does not involve any procurement of goods or services directly by ECC and it does not involve changes to ECC services. All goods and services required to implement these measures are being procured by Mitie, the Council's Total Facilities Management (TFM) service provider.
- 3.7 Every effort has been made to maximise value for money in sourcing items. Mitie have consulted their range of suppliers to source the best prices available whilst considering stock availability and delivery-lead times. Existing contracts, that have previously been assessed against value for money criteria, have been used wherever possible.
- 3.8 The above measures are required to allow a limited number of staff who cannot carry out all of their job from home to safely return to our offices. The Corporate Leadership Team have agreed that working from home still remains the default option for ECC staff for the time being and returning to the workplace will be an exception, not the norm.

#### **4. Options**

- 4.1 **Option 1:** Do nothing. ECC has a legal obligation as well as a moral duty to protect its staff by reducing workplace risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level. If we do not implement the required measures in our offices, the safety of our staff will be put at risk. If a proportion of staff are not able to work from our offices, the Council's ability to deliver key services may be negatively impacted.
- 4.2 **Option 2 (Recommended)** Approve the requested investment of £308,120 to implement measures in the main ECC office locations that will reduce the risk of COVID-19 and allow a proportion of staff to resume working from these locations. This option and the associated costs have been approved by CLT.

#### **5. Issues for consideration**

##### **5.1 Financial implications**

- 5.1.1 The total requested investment of £308,120 covers initial site set up and monthly running costs from 27 May 2020 to the end of November 2020. It is proposed that this is funded from the Health and Safety Reserve.
- 5.1.2 The costs are estimates based upon anticipated usage of consumable items. Costs will be tightly controlled, whilst monitoring utilisation and reduced where possible.
- 5.1.3 The estimated set-up costs and ongoing monthly costs are set out in section 3.5 and cover items such as additional cleaning staff, cleaning materials, hand

sanitizer, desk screens and signage and installation costs. The demand for these items is currently high, increasing prices significantly and extending lead times for supply.

- 5.1.4 The total initial cost of site set up is estimated at £147,400 with monthly running costs thereafter. These costs are over and above regular facilities management costs and hence incremental to budget. Following completion of the first quarter of 2020/21, a review will take place to assess the position against budget due to lockdown measures taken and spends incurred.
- 5.1.5 If the restrictions put in place can be eased within the 6-month period that this report covers, some of the ongoing monthly costs identified may be saved. However, equally, should the recovery period extend beyond 6 months and these measures are required to continue then additional costs will need to be incurred and a further request for funding sought.

## **5.2 Legal implications**

- 5.2.1 All drawdowns from reserves must be approved by the Cabinet Member for Finance.
- 5.2.2 A risk assessment has been undertaken and these measures are considered appropriate by the building managers to reduce the risk to our employees and to visitors to ECC premises.

## **6. Equality and Diversity implications**

- 6.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
  - (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act. In summary, the Act makes discrimination etc on the grounds of a protected characteristic unlawful
  - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
  - (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.
- 6.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, gender, and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).
- 6.3 The equality impact assessment indicates that the measures proposed to be implemented could have a disproportionately adverse impact on people who have a physical or sensory impairment. In order to facilitate social distancing,

movement around the buildings will be restricted and one-way systems will be implemented where appropriate. This will be enforced with signage which, due to scale and timelines, will not be able to include braille. To mitigate any disproportionately adverse impact of these measures, CLT has agreed that line managers will be responsible for conducting an individual risk assessment with any employee with a physical or sensory impairment before they can return to work. This will allow individual circumstances to be appropriately considered and will identify if reasonable adjustments to the measures are required.

## **7. List of appendices**

### **7.1 Equality Impact Assessment**

## **8. List of Background papers**

None.

<b>I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.</b>	<b>Date</b> 23 June 2020
<b>Councillor Chris Whitbread, Cabinet Member for Finance</b>	

**In consultation with:**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Mark Carroll, Executive Director, Place and Public Health</b>	10 June 2020
<b>Executive Director, Finance and Technology (S151 Officer)</b> <b>Stephanie Mitchener on behalf of Nicole Wood</b>	15 June 2020
<b>Director, Legal and Assurance (Monitoring Officer)</b> <b>Paul Turner</b>	15 June 2020