

Committees: Operational Property and Projects Sub Committee– For decision Policy and Resources Committee – For decision	Dated: 13 February 2023 23 February 2023
Subject: Royal Commonwealth Society and 65 Basinghall Street, Guildhall	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	6, 7 and 8
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	£0
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
Report of: The Remembrancer and City Surveyor	For Decision
Report author: Dorian Price, Guildhall Manager	

Summary

The Royal Commonwealth Society is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens throughout the world, and is the oldest charity dedicated to the Commonwealth.

The Society's Patron was for many years, until her death, Queen Elizabeth II. All the Royal Patronages are currently being reviewed but The Queen Consort has assumed the role of Vice Patron and is actively engaged with the Society.

The Society's responsibilities include leading the arrangements for the Commonwealth Day service at Westminster Abbey, attended annually by the Monarch and organising The Queen's Commonwealth essay competition for young people. The Society also originated the annual High Commissioners' Banquet now held in partnership with the Corporation at Guildhall.

The Society's staff of a maximum of five individuals is currently seeking office space, following the sale of the premises in which it is currently housed. In view of the relationship of the Society with the Corporation noted below, this report invites Members to agree that the Society may join the Corporation's other strategic and community partners at 65 Basinghall Street by offering the Society working space there (see Appendix 1 – 65 Basinghall floorplan).

Recommendations

Members are invited: -

- a) to offer the RCS working space at 65 Basinghall Street, as set out in appendix 1, joining the Corporation's other strategic and community partners accommodated at the complex.
- b) To instruct the Comptroller and City Solicitor, if the offer is made, to settle the terms of occupation in the form of a 5 year Lease in the terms referred to in the proposals noted in this report and the draft heads of terms set out in appendix 2.
- c) To note the accommodation is offered rent free and that such occupation costs as arise in consequence of the arrangement, if agreed, will be met from the City Surveyor's local risk budget for Guildhall.
- d) Note the proposed terms include flexibility for the City to regain occupation upon 6 months' notice at any time should the accommodation be required for other purposes.

Main report

Background

1. Over recent years, relations between the City Corporation and the Commonwealth have grown, largely through the Corporation's developing relationship with the Royal Commonwealth Society. The Society is the oldest charity dedicated to the Commonwealth, an institution which had a prominent and special place in the affections of Her Late Majesty, and of which His Majesty The King is now head.
2. Examples of this developing collaboration include the annual High Commissioners' Banquet formerly held at St James's Palace but now hosted at Guildhall. This event brings together diplomatic representatives and UK and Commonwealth community and industry leaders and is seen as a highlight of the Commonwealth calendar. The dedication of Epping Forest to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, the first dedication of its kind within this historic "green" initiative, and now The Queen's Green Canopy which develops the sustainability theme with its tree planting programme, are other instances of the collaboration.
3. There are further opportunities for collaborative engagement to the mutual advantage of both institutions. The Queen's Commonwealth essay competition for young people, now actively sponsored by The Queen Consort, is an example of this potential as are the arrangements for the Commonwealth Day service at Westminster Abbey and events surrounding it, through the political, diplomatic, and civic society contacts which they bring as part of the annual commemoration.

Current position

4. The sale of the premises in which the Society is currently housed under a concessionary arrangement has resulted in the Society enquiring of the Remembrancer whether the City might consider assisting them with accommodation. In doing so, the problem being faced in securing charitable support to fund it has been marked out by the Society as a major difficulty.

Proposals

5. Members are invited to agree that an offer be made to the Royal Commonwealth Society to join the other Strategic and Community partners for which accommodation is made and currently available at 65 Basinghall Street (Thames 21, Partnership for Young London, Thames Reach Housing Association, the Lord Mayor's Appeal team and Agilisys). This office space has been identified as suitable for the Society and there is currently no corporate requirement for the space.
6. This office space is temporarily occupied by the energy contractor Vital Energi, who are finalising their lighting project in North Wing. Vital Energi will vacate the space for RCS if Members approve this proposal.
7. The attribution of costs (the proportion of the rates, insurance and utilities which may be attributed to the 348 ft.² of workspace) can be borne by the City Surveyor's local risk budget for Guildhall.
8. It is proposed that the accommodation is made available in the form of a Lease to be contracted outside the security of tenure and compensation provisions of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954, including a rolling landlord's only break clause, at nil rent. This means that, if the space is needed, the City Surveyor may on reasonable notice terminate the arrangement. As a matter of goodwill, it is envisaged that the Surveyor will, in those circumstances, endeavour to relocate the RCS to another available workspace, if available, but this will not be a contractual obligation.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

9. Strategic implications – The allocation of 65 Basinghall Street for RCS would increase the use of this asset. At present, there are no other corporate requirements for the space. Terms will allow for CoL to obtain vacant possession should this be required for other purposes such as the Guildhall Refurbishment programme.
10. Financial implications - The premises running costs for this building currently sit in the City Surveyor's overall local risk budget for the Guildhall complex. The proposal is for the accommodation to be provided rent free as with other occupiers such as Thames 21, Partnership for Young London, Thames Reach Housing Association.
11. Resource implications – RCS will be required to set up their own IT network at their cost, utilising Corporation office furniture. City Surveyor officers will produce the Schedule of Condition using inhouse resources.
12. Legal implications – The Comptroller and City Solicitor's comments have been incorporated in this report.
13. Risk implications – None.

14. Equalities implications – None.

15. Climate implications- None.

16. Security implications – None.

Conclusion

17. In view of the strategic importance to the City of the Royal Commonwealth Society's work, and its charitable status, the offer of workspace at 65 Basinghall Street as an operational office facility appears to be a positive proposal for members to consider.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – 65 Basinghall floorplan
- Appendix 2 - Draft Heads of Terms

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