

meeting ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

date 11th November 2009 agenda item number **8**

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

MINORITY GROUP ACCOMMODATION

1. **Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To update the Committee on arrangements for accommodating the minority groups and determine accommodation for the Liberal Democrat Group.

2. **Information and Advice**

- 2.1 The Council has traditionally provided accommodation at County Hall for members organised for the separate political groups. This has generally been the majority group, the main opposition group, and the third group.
- 2.2 The election in June 2009 resulted in a change of control, an increase in the size of the Liberal Democrat group, and the election of several smaller parties which formed an independents group.
- 2.3 Members of the new majority group have been accommodated on the first floor. The main opposition group is accommodated on the ground floor of the H block.
- 2.4 The Conservative Group has taken up less space on the first floor than the previous administration and two offices have been returned to use (one for the Change Programme team and one for the Service Director, Finance).
- 2.5 With fewer members, the Labour Group is occupying less space on the ground floor and two offices will be converted to small meeting rooms (8/10 people each).
- 2.6 Prior to the election the Liberal Democrat Group had 5 members and was accommodated on the ground floor (opposite Committee Room C). There was no provision for an additional group. The Independents Group were allocated the Oak room on a temporary basis.
- 2.7 ICT facilities are provided to members on the basis that they may be undertaking council work in a number of locations – including County

Hall and home. The availability of e-mail and internet links means that members can work effectively away from County Hall.

- 2.8 The assumptions behind members accommodation are broadly that:
- a) Each political group needs an area separate from the other political groups for reasons of confidentiality
 - b) The accommodation needs to enable members to work at County Hall, and to interact with other members of the group (formally and informally)
 - c) Members do need access to IT when at County Hall although this can be on a shared basis.
- 2.9 The specific nature of the accommodation needs to reflect the specific roles undertaken by members of the group. It needs to enable members to work effectively while at County Hall but also take account of the other pressures on accommodation.

3. **Options**

- 3.1 Discussions were held with the Independents Group and Liberal Democrat Group shortly after the election. At the time several options were put to them, ie: to remodel Committee Room A; to remodel the Exchange meeting room; to extend the Liberal Democrats current accommodation to include the Oak room.
- 3.2 To adapt Committee Room A and the Exchange would have taken two large meeting rooms out of action. They would have been replaced by smaller meeting rooms (ie the rooms currently occupied by the Liberal Democrats and the Oak Room).
- 3.3 The Independent Group made a decision that their preference was to occupy a refurbished Committee Room A and the work necessary to convert Committee Room A was undertaken during the recess. It was necessary to move quickly as the Independent Group had no existing accommodation they could occupy.
- 3.4 Following discussion it became apparent that it would be difficult to lose the Exchange as a large meeting room (capacity of 20) and an alternative proposal was put to the Liberal Democrats Group which would have meant them retaining their current room and using the adjacent Oak Room for informal meetings. They would also be guaranteed use of a meeting room for group meetings etc as necessary.
- 3.5 After discussions the Group concluded that they would prefer to occupy the Exchange.
- 3.6 Outline plans are attached. The advantages and disadvantages of each option are summarised below.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Exchange	Provides space for members. Releases two smaller rooms for meetings.	Loses a large meeting room for 20 people for space for 9. Cost of conversion. Is away from the political heart of County Hall and would lead to under-occupation of valuable space.
Existing Accommodation plus Oak Room	Minimum cost model. Well established presence. Both rooms traditionally used by the Liberal Democrat Group. Enables the retention of large and well-used meeting room.	The space is less flexible than the alternative.

4. **RECOMMENDED**

It is recommended that

- I. The Liberal Democrat Group accommodation consist of their current room and the Oak Room and they be given use of larger meeting rooms for group meetings etc as necessary.

Councillor Kay Cutts
Chair of the Administration Committee

Statutory and Policy Implications

This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service and where such implications are material they have been described in the text of the report.

Service Director (Finance) Comments (MB 30/010/09)

The cost of the conversion will be met from the 2009/10 budget for the Chief Executive's department.

Legal Services Comments (NAB 20.10.09)

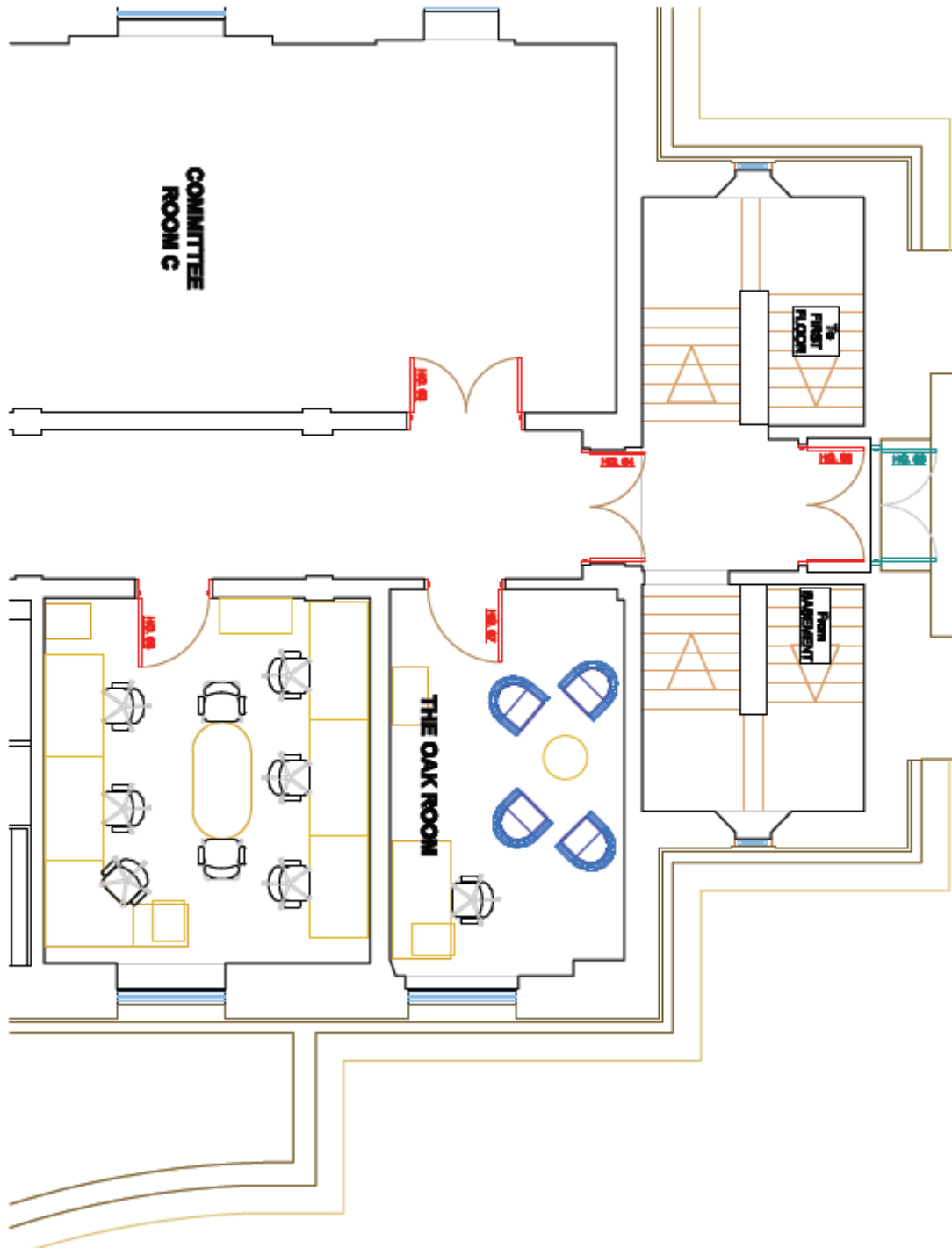
The Administration Committee has authority under paragraph 9.5 of Part 3 of the Constitution to make a decision under the recommendation as set out in this report.

Background Papers Available for Inspection

Electoral Divisions Affected

All

Existing accommodation and Oak room



Exchange

