

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

18 June 2021

Agenda Item	7
Report No	VAL/8/21

Departmental Report – Dingwall Office Lease

Report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Summary

This report considers whether a break clause in the lease for the Board's Office in Dingwall should be invoked.

1. Lease

The office in Dingwall is held under a 25-year lease from 25 June 2007 and expires on 24 June 2032. There is a tenant's break clause that can be exercised after 15 years. If the break clause is to be exercised one year's notice must be provided. Such notice of intent must be served by 24 June 2021, the lease would then terminate on 24 June 2022. The current annual rent is £29,000.

2. Staffing

The staffing levels at the Dingwall office have been reducing over the years in response to budgetary pressures and the realisation of efficiency savings. Consequently, there are now only 9 members of staff based in the Dingwall office.

3. Storage

In addition to accommodating staff, the Dingwall office is also used to store a large number of property files. Most of these files relate to Council Tax and are infrequently accessed. It has previously been considered that cost savings could be realised by either remote storage or digitalisation of these files.

4. Existing Board Policy

Previously, the Board indicated a desire to sublet the Dingwall office as less accommodation was required. This was never achieved, in part due to the intervention of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are inherent difficulties regarding subletting given the internal layout of the premises and the need to maintain data security.

5. Post COVID Working Environment

It is increasingly recognised that there will be changes in the post pandemic working environment given the experiences in relation to the current homeworking regime. There is a likely to be a move to more flexible working with a greater incidence of staff

working from home, for at least part of the working week. This possibility was represented in a VJB staff survey and seems to be one that is held more widely in the office working community.

6. Options

1. Continue the lease for a further 10 years and deal with any surplus requirement by subletting or assignation of the lease.
2. Serve notice to terminate the lease and either seek smaller accommodation in Dingwall or move the staff to the Inverness office. In either of the option 2 scenarios a solution to the file storage issue identified at section 3 of this report would also be envisaged.

7. Recommendation

The Board is invited to approve option 2 as outlined in section 6 of this report.

Designation: Assessor and ERO

Date: 11 June 2021

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