

Audit of the implementation of the property strategy for operational real estate

Federal Office for Customs and Border Security

Key facts

The Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (FOCBS) is currently undergoing an extensive transformation process, the core of which is the DaziT programme. The aim of this programme is to enable customs and border security tasks to be handled anywhere and at any time with the maximum degree of digitalisation in the future. The current nationwide operational real estate portfolio has evolved over the years, and no longer meets today's needs and those still to come.

The existing portfolio of FOCBS operational real estate contains 1,057 properties comprising land and buildings that are either owned by the Confederation or rented. The implementation of the property strategy for operational real estate is intended to support the new organisation, comprehensive 360° checks, customs clearance automation requirements, and the mobile handling of checking and intervention tasks. In addition to this, the current portfolio is to be reduced to 447 properties and adapted over a period of 20 years. The construction of eight intervention centres is another core element of the property strategy.

Investments of around CHF 850 million (CHF 640 million of which in new investments) are planned for the implementation, to be spread over a period of 20 years. With the Federal Council's decision of 27 April 2022, the FOCBS was tasked with implementing the property strategy for the FOCBS operational real estate.

Against this backdrop, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) examined how the FOCBS, together with the Federal Office for Buildings and Logistics (FOBL), had planned to implement the property strategy for operational real estate. The existing real estate portfolio is managed appropriately by the FOBL. In controlling the property strategy, however, it is apparent that there is still some room for improvement and refinement between the two offices.

The implementation assumptions of the property strategy involves risks

In the property strategy for operational real estate, the requirements are defined in terms of geographical and tactical aspects and real estate type, and an initial rough estimate of the costs is provided using imprecise figures. However, this project can only be implemented under the defined framework conditions. One major risk is that the financial resources have not yet been approved. As a result, the property strategy would have to be adapted accordingly should the framework conditions change. The FOCBS is assuming that the upcoming changes to the legislation will not affect the property strategy.

In the cooperation between the FOCBS and FOBL, there is a need for clarification when planning requirements

The property strategy will be implemented over a period of 20 years. During this time, various offices and projects such as DaziT are to be involved in the requirements planning. To this end, organisational structures have been defined by the FOCBS and FOBL for the collaboration. The

roles and tasks have been broadly agreed between the two partners, and the tasks, competencies and responsibilities now need to be established in detail.

Discussions on future potential synergies must be intensified during the requirements planning phase, and the new operational standards tested at an early stage

The FOCBS has defined the initial synergy aims in the property strategy. However, it must involve key synergy partners, such as the Federal Roads Office (FEDRO), the cantons and other authorities, at an early stage – not only at individual project level. When drawing up the property strategy, the FEDRO was welcomed and provided with information. The regular, formal coordination with synergy partners needs to be intensified.

The FOCBS has defined its operating standards and is testing them in a pilot project using an intervention centre combined with a base location (St Margrethen). However, this is not planned to come into operation until 2029. To obtain findings on the new operating standards earlier, the SFAO recommends that smaller property types also be tested, as they may be available for use sooner.

The FOBL must establish an audience-appropriate reporting system in collaboration with the FOCBS

No method has yet been defined for reporting on the implementation of the property strategy for operational real estate. Furthermore, the General Secretariat responsible does not have a development plan with the main investment intentions in order to assess and prioritise the related applications. Regular reporting on the progress of the implementation, as well as an overall view, will create transparency and trust. With this in mind, the SFAO recommends that the FOBL, together with the FOCBS, draw up audience-appropriate external communications on the basis of transparent, consolidated information.

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