

OVERVIEW SCRUTINY GROUP – 11TH DECEMBER 2017

Report of the Cabinet

ITEM 07 OVERVIEW SCRUTINY GROUP PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY - CABINET RESPONSE

Purpose of Report

To set out the Cabinet's responses to the recommendations of the Group on pre-decision scrutiny items.

Action Requested

To note the Cabinet's responses to the recommendations submitted by the Group on items considered for pre-decision scrutiny.

Policy Context

One of the principles of effective scrutiny, identified by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, is "provide a constructive critical friend challenge to the Executive".

Pre-decision Scrutiny

Since the September meeting of the Group, the Cabinet has considered the following items on which the Group undertook pre-decision scrutiny:

- A. SUPERFAST LEICESTERSHIRE BROADBAND
- B. CARILLON TOWER WAR MEMORIAL REFURBISHMENT
- C. BUY BACK OF FORMER COUNCIL PROPERTIES

Details of the Group's consideration of the items as reported to the Cabinet on 16th November 2017 are set out in the appendix to this report.

The Chair of the Group, Councillor Taylor, attended the Cabinet's meeting on 16th November 2017 to present the Group's reports to the Cabinet.

Cabinet Response

The Cabinet considered the Group's reports and acknowledged the work undertaken and the views of the Group. In particular, the Cabinet responded as follows to the reports:

Superfast Leicestershire Broadband

The Cabinet adopted the officer recommendations, which the Group had supported.

Carillon Tower War Memorial Refurbishment

The Cabinet adopted the officer recommendations, which the Group had supported.

Buy Back of Former Council Properties

The Cabinet adopted the officer recommendations, which the Group had supported

Report Implications

The following implications have been identified for this report:

Financial Implications

None.

Risk Management

No risks have been identified in connection with this report.

Background Papers: None

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SUPERFAST LEICESTERSHIRE BROADBAND

Recommendation of the Overview Scrutiny Group

That the Cabinet be informed that the Group supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Strategic Director for Housing, Planning and Regeneration, and Regulatory Services.

Reason

Having considered the report and asked questions of The Team Leader for Regeneration and Economic Development on the matter, the Group concluded that it would be appropriate to approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

Meeting Discussion

Following questions from the Group, the Team Leader for Regeneration and Economic Development provided the following responses:

- (i) The funding was designed to achieve superfast broadband speeds (defined as at least 24 Mbps) to local service cabinets. The broadband speed achieved at individual properties would depend on the distance of the property from the cabinet and the equipment that was used in the property.
- (ii) The Government defined what the superfast broadband standard was. It had changed that standard from 15 Mbps to the current 24 Mbps.
- (iii) It was not possible to say how many properties in Charnwood would benefit from the further round of funding, or where those properties would be, until the contract for the work had been procured. The contractor would look at where the best results could be achieved. It was known which cabinets remained to be upgraded.
- (iv) The network infrastructure was owned by BT but there was an open access agreement which enabled other providers to access the network.
- (v) The deadline for obtaining match funding from the Government had passed but Leicestershire County Council believed that the Government would continue to honour its previous commitment to provide match funding for schemes. The recommendations in the Cabinet report included providing delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to enter into an agreement with the other authorities involved following a value for money assessment. By the time that assessment was carried out the amount of any Government funding would be known.
- (vi) Provision of superfast broadband was not currently required for new housing developments through planning conditions or Section 106 Agreements. The Government expected that market forces would encourage developers to provide this. That tended to be the case for

larger developments but not necessarily for smaller ones. The issue could be considered as part of the current review of the Local Plan and the Team Leader for Regeneration and Economic Development undertook to make relevant officers aware that the issue had been raised by the Group.

- (vii) There were advantages to customers and service providers in enabling more transactions to take place online. In particular those related to greater convenience for customers and reduced transaction costs for service providers. This was consistent with the Council's approach to enhancing the ability of customers to access Council services online.

CARILLON TOWER WAR MEMORIAL REFURBISHMENT

Recommendation of the Overview Scrutiny Group

That the Cabinet be informed that the Group supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Leisure and Culture.

Reason

Having considered the report and asked questions of the Strategic Director for Neighbourhoods and Community Wellbeing and the Head of Leisure and Culture on the matter, the Group concluded that it would be appropriate to approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

Meeting Discussion

Following questions from the Group, the Head of Leisure and Culture provided the following responses:

- (i) The building was structurally sound and the work would safeguard the building for the future.
- (ii) The cost figures in the report were estimates based on the condition survey. In order to proceed there would be a tender exercise and the costs from that tender exercise would form the basis of the grant application to the War Memorials Trust. The Council was not expecting the costs from the tender exercise to be higher than those quoted in the report.
- (iii) The Council would also look at other sources of funding in addition to the War Memorials Trust. Those could include crowd funding, the national lottery and other grants for work to the bells and the clavier. The Council would use its best endeavours to obtain external funding but the full cost of the works had been allocated in the Capital Plan to ensure that the work could proceed.
- (iv) As part of the tender process, the specifications for the work, for example the timber to be used and other materials, would be specified by the architect. This was to ensure that the requirements of the War Memorials Trust and Historic England were met.
- (v) Any costs for dismantling exhibits would not form part of the grant application but were likely to be small.
- (vi) The work would require scaffolding to be erected around the tower. Security of the scaffolding and the site during the work would be built into the price that would be quoted by the contractor.

BUY BACK OF FORMER COUNCIL PROPERTIES

Recommendation of the Overview Scrutiny Group

That the Cabinet be informed that the Group supports the recommendations as set out in the report of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing.

Reason

Having considered the report and asked questions of the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing on the matter, the Group concluded that it would be appropriate to approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

Meeting Discussion

Following questions from the Group, the Head of Strategic and Private Sector Housing provided the following responses:

- (i) The Council looked at a number of factors before deciding whether or not to repurchase a property that it was offered. Those included the demand for the type and location of the property being offered, the costs of any refurbishment work that was required and whether there were any management issues associated with the type and location of the property. The greatest need was for two-bedroomed houses.
- (ii) No specific budget had been allocated for repurchasing properties. The availability of funding would be considered as each case arose. Government regulations prevented the Council from using right to buy receipts to repurchase former Council properties within the first 10 years after the property was sold. However, after that period the costs of refurbishment to bring the property up to an appropriate standard could be greater.
- (iii) The Council would not normally consider repurchasing properties that would require conversion or reconfiguration because of the costs involved in carrying out that work.
- (iv) Since 2014/15 the Council had been offered 21 properties because there was a covenant requiring that the Council be offered the option to repurchase it and 15 other properties. Only one of those had been a two-bedroomed house. It had not been considered appropriate to repurchase that property because of its condition.