

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

23 May 2023

Subject: Service Devolution and Asset Transfer Policy update

Executive Summary

Update Overview & Scrutiny Management committee on Service Devolution and Asset Transfer policy following its approval by Cabinet in September 2022.

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Subject: Service Devolution and Asset Transfer (SDAT) Policy update

Purpose of Report

To update O&S Management Committee on progress of newly adopted SDAT policy as requested by Scrutiny following the task group review and the review of Cabinet's new SDAT policy.

Background

On the 27 September 2022, Wiltshire Council adopted a new SDAT policy, which has been shared with Town and Parish councils in the County. When the policy was reviewed by the O&S Management Committee task group it was resolved that a progress update be brought back to Committee in 6 months.

Update

At the 27 May 2022 Town & Parish Council conference held at County Hall, an update was provided on the emerging themes and changes likely in the revised SDAT policy. At that conference expression of interests was asked for those Councils who were interested in progressing either service devolution and/or asset transfer post the Cabinets approval of a new policy. Councils were also asked which specific services and/or assets they were interested to hold discussions about.

Following the implementation of the updated Service Devolution Asset Transfer Policy adopted by Cabinet on 27 September 2022, Wiltshire Council followed up the initial expression of interest by engaging with those Town & Parish Councils that expressed an interest to identify which councils would be still keen to explore a possible SDAT deal in line with the new policy guidance.

Those Councils were written to in October 2022 and asked if they would like to explore a deal, however this would have to be in line with the new guidance.

Given the significant changes to the economy nationally over the last year, many councils were not able to commit to a possible SDAT currently, as other pressures were cited as more significant for the Town and Parish councils to focus on. Out of the 12 councils that expressed an interest in May 2022, only 4 councils expressed an interest to continue in line with the agreed Policy after being written to in October 2022.

There is a limited capacity and resource to progress multiple SDAT deals within Wiltshire Council, when considering the services, administration and legal work

involved to finalise a deal. It was therefore decided that Wiltshire Council would pilot one Council to work with to explore a deal under the new policy.

This method would then generate savings that would enable the progression of further deals, rather than applying all of the one off resource made available in one go to one or two deals. This would therefore enable the policy to be sustainable albeit would take longer, depending on the appetite for councils to progress deals.

The Council used the minimum services and minimum assets as listed in the new policy to determine which council to take forward. A number of councils who expressed interest in both May and then again in October did not meet this new criterion.

Westbury Town Council expressed a strong desire to discuss a deal with all factors of the new policy being considered, therefore Wiltshire Council are currently in preliminary discussions with Westbury Town Council on a possible SDAT deal.

Upon progress being made with this pilot, Wiltshire Council will branch out requests once more to Town and Parish councils, who may be in a better position in the future to proceed with a SDAT deal under the agreed policy.

It should be noted that the service delegation to Trowbridge Town Council was approved on 31 March 2023 by Cabinet and came into effect from 1 April 2023. In order to meet the new policy the Town Council agreed to the service and asset transfer of the cemetery, although this will come into effect from 1 April 2024 to allow the Town Council the time to prepare for taking on work associated with burials.

Next Steps

The Council will progress discussions with Westbury Town Council and will continue, if desired, to update O&S committee on progress made with the deal and the overall progression of the policy.

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