

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet Member for Housing, Libraries, Leisure and Flooding

Rapid Scrutiny - Future Delivery Model for the Repairs, Improvements and Maintenance of Council Owned Assets

Purpose

1. To report to the Cabinet Member for Housing, Libraries, Leisure and Flooding the outcome of the rapid scrutiny exercise established by the Environment Select Committee and held on 8 September 2015 to consider the report on Future Delivery Model for the Repairs, Improvements and Maintenance of Council Owned Assets prior to it being presented to Cabinet on 15 September 2015.

Background

2. On 1 September 2015 the Environment Select Committee was informed that a report on the Future Delivery Model for the Repairs, Improvements and Maintenance of Council Owned Assets would be presented to Cabinet on 15 September.
3. It was explained that the Council's Housing team had reviewed the way in which its contracts were structured and delivered through a comprehensive review of the service considering all of the delivery models in the housing sector. Officers, residents, the Housing Board and several councillors had been part of this comprehensive review of the different contractual arrangements that exist.
4. Some of the options considered, and the option proposed, were radically different to the current model and through a rapid scrutiny exercise Overview and Scrutiny would have an opportunity to consider these prior to the report being presented to Cabinet.
5. The Committee resolved for rapid scrutiny exercise to take place on 8 September 2015. The opportunity to take part in the rapid scrutiny was offered to members and substitutes of the Environment Select committee, subsequently Councillors Bridget Wayman, Peter Evans and Magnus Macdonald were appointed with Councillor Wayman elected as the lead member for the exercise.

Evidence

6. The following papers were made available prior to the meeting:

- Report to Cabinet (15 September 2015) - Establishment of a Wholly Owned Subsidiary (WOS) (Housing) repairs and maintenance, planned and investment works as well as client function;
 - Appendix to report to Cabinet (15 September) – Wholly Owned Subsidiary – WOS – Options Paper.
7. As requested at the meeting the following report was subsequently circulated to members of the rapid scrutiny:
- Echelon - High Level Procurement Options Appraisal Report - Updated June 2015
8. Although scrutiny members welcomed the opportunity to be involved before the report was considered by Cabinet, it was felt that it would have been helpful to see the High Level Procurement Options Appraisal Report or to have more information in the report to explain why other options had been dismissed as it would have enabled members to understand the reasons for the WOS being proposed.
9. The Associate Director for Adult Care, Safeguarding and Housing and the Cabinet Member for Housing, Libraries, Leisure and Flooding provided the background information and explained the process followed to determine that the WOS would deliver a more effective service which offered reassurance to the scrutiny members.

Deliberation

10. During the ensuing discussion the scrutiny members expressed their concerns about a number of issues including:
- a. That the procurement of a “partnering contractor” that would manage the delivery of the Council’s housing asset management function and housing maintenance client function could lead to monopoly which may not provide the best value for money and would also prevent smaller contractors, with specialist skills and expertise, to bid as they would be more likely to be able to provide only parts of the service;
 - b. That resources was a key factor in being able to deliver the service and options to address the issues of retention of staff and the current skills gap in this service area should be carefully considered;
 - c. That ICT would underpin the success of the WOS and could also lead to improvement in customer satisfaction (for example good recording of information and the information being shared appropriately so that there is no need for the customer to repeat the information);
 - d. That tenants would have to be accurately informed of how (and when) to report repairs so that responsive repairs can be further reduced as tenants would be aware of what to look for.

Recommendations

11. The rapid scrutiny group recommends that the Wiltshire Council's Cabinet Member for Housing, Libraries, Leisure and Flooding notes the following comments and makes representations as such to Cabinet at its meeting on 15 September 2015:
 - a. That further consideration, likely to be through soft market testing, be given to having more than one contractor involved with the WOS;
 - b. That apprenticeship schemes and on-going development programme, for staff members who would be part of the WOS, are considered;
 - c. That adequate ICT is a criteria in selecting contractor(s);
 - d. That it is recognised that communication to tenants on how (and when) to report repairs will be essential.
12. That Cabinet take into account the outcome of the rapid scrutiny and the four comments detailed in paragraph 11 above when considering the report on 15 September 2015.
13. That another Rapid Scrutiny exercise is undertaken, prior to the formal start of the procurement process, to enable the scrutiny members to consider the details of the proposed WOS.

Cllr Bridget Wayman, lead member for the rapid scrutiny

Report author: Marie Gondlach, Senior Scrutiny Officer, 01225 713 597,
marie.gondlach@wiltshire.gov.uk

Background documents

None