

Follaton House Totnes

Briefing for Overview and Scrutiny on the work of the Accommodation Working Group

Recommendation:

To note progress of the Accommodation Working Group (AWG)

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The Accommodation Working Group AWG was formally established at the Annual Council meeting held on 16 May 2019 to monitor and review whether it was in the Council's best interest to stay at Follaton House.
- 1.2 The AWG comprises of Cllrs David May (Chair); Nicky Hopwood; Hilary Bastone and John Birch.
- 1.3 The Group has met with officers on four occasions since July 2019 to review options for possible relocation of the Council Offices and also for the future use of Follaton House and Estate should the Council decide to remain in situ. These meetings have been open to other Members to attend and partake.
- 1.4 Under the Group's Terms of Reference (Appendix A refers), the AWG is tasked with making recommendations to the Executive and/or Council on the proposed strategy.
- 1.5 The Terms of Reference also include the provision for the Overview & Scrutiny Panel to be able to monitor the progress of the work of the AWG. An update report was requested at the last meeting of the Panel on 23rd January and it has been proposed that the Chair, as a member of AWG, offers a verbal update.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's occupation of Follaton House has been reducing since agile working was introduced. They now occupy a little over half the accommodation in the building.
- 2.2 The LGA joint Council Peer review in January 2019 recommended a review of the future accommodation needs of both Councils (South Hams and West Devon).
- 2.3 The Executive in March 2019, acknowledging the Peer Group recommendations, agreed to the setting up a Member Working Group to consider whether the Council should remain at Follaton House or relocate.
- 2.4 The Group has reviewed not only the financial implications of a potential relocation but also the social, economic and environmental impact of moving.
- 2.5 The AWG has also considered the potential to make improvements to the Follaton Estate which has included:
 - a. Reviewing the potential to expand the use of the House and Gardens to facilitate external events such as commercial weddings.
 - b. Reviewing the transition from *Council Offices* to a commercial business and events hub.
 - c. Making improvements to the Arboretum to address declining infrastructure and increase its impact for recreation; education and environmental awareness.

3. Outcomes/outputs

- 3.1 A draft report is being prepared for the Council's Executive meeting on March 19th 2020 that sets out the Working Group's recommendations along with a programme and budgets for further assessment of work over the forthcoming months

Appendix A

Accommodation Working Group (AWG) - Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

To review and agree an accommodation strategy for South Hams District Council and make recommendations to Executive (and/or Council) as appropriate.

2. Membership and quorum

- Total membership of the AWG shall not exceed 3 members and will include the Portfolio Holder for Assets.
- The Chair of the meeting shall be the Portfolio Holder for Assets
- The AWG should reflect political balance in so far as is practicable.
- The quorum for meetings shall be at least two members.
- Each member of the AWG shall have one vote and issues will be decided by a simple majority
- The AWG may invite consultants, specialist advisors and officers to provide advice and information and/or attend AWG meetings in an advisory capacity.

3. Meetings

- The frequency of its meetings will be determined by the AWG
- An agenda and associated papers will be made available to the AWG at least 3 days before the date of the meeting
- AWG meetings will not be open to the public
- A summary of the AWG meetings will be made available to all members.

4. Remit

In consultation with the Head of Assets Practice:

- To define and agree the future accommodation requirements of South Hams such that the delivery of services is not effected.
- To consider how those accommodation requirements can be met through adaption of existing or identifying alternative facilities within the District,
- To discuss the findings of the AWG with the JWG to ensure it is consistent with the accommodation of West Devon.
- To make recommendations to the Executive (and/or Council as appropriate) on the proposed strategy.

5. Overview & Scrutiny Panel

- The Overview & Scrutiny Panel will monitor progress of the work of the AWG.

6. Changes to the terms of reference for the Working Group

- Minor amendments (as determined by [the Monitoring Officer] to the terms of reference may be made by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader.
- Any other amendments shall be made by the Council.