

Mayor and Cabinet			
Report Title	Response to call-in of Mayor and Cabinet Decision – Disposal of Former Wide Horizons Sites in Wales and Kent		
Contributors	Head of Business and Committee		
Class	Part 1		Date: 11 March 2020

1 Purpose and Summary of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Mayor and Cabinet of the reason agreed for the call-in, and to ask them to reconsider a decision made in relation to the “Disposal of Former Wide Horizons Sites in Wales and Kent”.
- 1.2 This report informs the Mayor and Cabinet of a call-in and associated comments by the Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel (OSBP) on 28 January 2020 in accordance with Paragraph 14 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Mayor and Cabinet is requested to respond to the call-in made by the Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel as described in paragraph 5 below.

3 Background

- 3.1 Members of the OSBP noted that Wide Horizons, an adventure learning charity formed in 2004 as a result of a joint initiative had gone into liquidation in 2018.
- 3.2 At the time of the liquidation, Wide Horizons were managing eight outdoor centres and an outreach service providing adventure experiences for children and young people. Three of these outdoor centres, two located in Wales and one in Kent, are owned by Lewisham Council.
- 3.3 Since the liquidation Lewisham Council undertook responsibility for maintenance and other associated costs for the three sites it owned.

- 3.4 A proposal to grant authorisation to dispose of the three sites owned by Lewisham Council was agreed at the meeting of the Mayor and Cabinet on 15 January 2020, subject to the Secretary of State for Education's consent being obtained. The decision taken by the Mayor and Cabinet was notified to Members of the OSB within 2 days of being made.
- 3.5 At the Business Panel meeting, Members received clarification from the Interim Executive Director of Children and Young People, and the Property Strategy & Technical Support Manager on the decision taken by the Mayor and Cabinet on 15 January 2020.
- 3.6 Following further review, Officers confirm the three properties do not form part of the strategic asset base of the Council and they therefore consider there are no broader implications in terms of services or the Council's corporate estate in proceeding with the decision to dispose of the properties. In terms of the current and potential future service requirements, there is no evidence that schools would use the provision. At the time of liquidation, there was very little take up of the places and schools have found alternative outdoor residential activity centres in the south east which offer much better facilities than those in the three centres concerned.
- 3.7 The OSBP resolution below flags the suggestion of retaining the land and seeking a rental income. The question of rental income was considered by officers prior to the earlier Mayor and Cabinet report – although not set out explicitly in that paper. Further review of the Agent's report suggests that the rental value of the two properties in Wales would be low – in the order of £2psqft. Whilst the rental potential in Kent would be higher the agent pointed to both the risk of achieving a rental and the likely need to offer a substantial rent-free period in order to attract a suitable tenant in the light of the level of works required to achieve a viable alternative use. Taken together the properties are unlikely to achieve a rental of much more than £15k pa. Hence in both cases there were material reasons why the original recommendation was to dispose of the property through Auction.

4 Comments by Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel

- 4.1 Having considered the decisions taken by the Mayor and Cabinet and clarification by Officers at the meeting of OSBP on 28 January 2020, Members noted submissions that disposal of the assets would not be detrimental to children and young people in Lewisham because there were other easily accessible and safer alternative facilities elsewhere. Members of the OSBP however expressed a view that the sale of the land would be detrimental to future generations and therefore should only be considered as a last resort. Members of the OSBP also agreed that the offer of available at Beckenham Place Park was excellent, but not comparable, as it was not residential.

5 Reason for Call-in of Decision by Mayor and Cabinet

- 5.1 Members of the OSBP resolved to call in the decision relating to the “Disposal of Former Wide Horizons Sites in Wales and Kent”, in order to enable Mayor and Cabinet to re-consider its decision, requesting that:

“Consideration should always be given to retain the freehold on land we own. In the circumstance, options for income generation should be properly considered to help cover costs currently incurred from the land, including possible future use and opportunities.”

6 Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Council’s Constitution provides that where the Overview & Scrutiny Business Panel requests that the Mayor & Cabinet reconsider a decision it shall not become effective until it has been done. There may be no further call-in of the decision.
- 6.2 It is essential that a decision is made on consideration of all relevant information and ignoring irrelevancies. On this basis a decision must not be one which no reasonable authority could come to.

7 Financial implications

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8 Equalities Implications

- 8.1 There are no Equalities implications arising from this report.

9 Environmental Implications

- 9.1 There are no Environmental implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Decision of Mayor and Cabinet of 15 January 2020.

If you have any queries on this report, please contact Jasmine Kassim, Senior Committee Manager, 0208 314 8577 or Kevin Flaherty, Head of Business and Committee on 0208 314 9327