

Resources and Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee

13 July 2016

A Single Public Property Register of Assets

Recommendation

1. That the Committee support the contents of this report and comments on the proposals in Section 3.

1.0 Key Issues

- 1.1 Councillors John Holland and Matt Western proposed a motion at the meeting of Council on 22 March 2016, 'That Warwickshire County Council seeks the cooperation of the District and Borough councils and other public bodies to establish a common public property asset register for Warwickshire to facilitate the delivery of public services across the County'
- 1.2 The resolution at this meeting was for Warwickshire County Council to explore the opportunities for cooperation with the District and Borough councils and other public bodies to establish a common public property asset register for Warwickshire to facilitate the delivery of public services across the County.
- 1.3 This motion was further discussed a Resources Fire & Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee "Public Property Asset Register Meeting" of 11 April 2016.
- 1.4 The resolution at this meeting was for Steve Smith, Head of Physical Assets to write to public bodies in Warwickshire to establish if there is an appetite for a Public Property Asset Register.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The notion of a common public sector property register is not new. Steps had already been taken to establish a "Sub-Regional Asset Register", as part of the work undertaken by Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire Property Officers Group. Work commenced to provide a combined asset register for public sector assets in the Sub Region in 2010. The purpose of this asset register was to support a West Midlands Property Alliance (WMPA) & Coventry Solihull & Warwickshire Association of Chief Execs (CSWACE) Work Stream - Sub Regional Approach to Assets. At that time the Property Officers Group was made up of property colleagues from:

- Coventry City Council
- Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
- North Warwickshire Borough Council
- Rugby Borough Council
- Stratford-on-Avon District Council
- Warwick District Council
- Warwickshire County Council
- Primary Care Trust
- Warwickshire Police

- 2.2 Following an agreement on approach the Asset Register was developed and shared amongst the Group, with a view to identifying opportunities to share use and potentially rationalise the portfolio. It was agreed that Warwickshire County Council should co-ordinate the development of a consistent database. The approach was restrictive, due to lack of resources, particularly within Districts/Boroughs and there was an inconsistency with data formats that proved problematical; but the objective of obtaining a sub-regional asset register was achieved.
- 2.3 Further to the development of the sub regional asset register, it was recognised in 2011 that it would be of benefit if the asset register was available in the form of a geographic map. It was agreed that all sub regional Authorities and other public sector bodies (Police/Health) would contribute to this process.
- 2.4 Warwickshire County Council took the lead on co-ordinating the development of a Sub Regional Map of Assets. In July 2012 this sub regional map was made available to all stakeholders through Atlasweb (WCC's web-based property database). The current process for updating the data is to obtain the current Asset Lists via Open Data listings that are made available on District, Borough, Police and Health websites.
- 2.5 The sub regional map still remains available via Atlasweb today and the supporting data was last updated by Warwickshire County Council in May 2016.
- 2.6 In 2014 Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Transparency Code 2014 made it a mandatory requirement for all Local Authorities to publish a list of assets owned or occupied to Open Data at least annually, with the first submission required by 2nd February 2015. The Transparency Agenda provided a schema for all Local Authorities to complete which identified compulsory and recommended datasets. The Code does not apply to Police and Crime Commissioners, for whom a separate transparency framework applies. As a result of the Transparency Code, all Local Authority Assets are available as open data. Warwickshire County Council, and all Districts and Borough Councils, have published a list of their assets as open data to their own websites and have been required to update this list at least annually since 2nd February 2015.

- 2.7 A recommendation of the Transparency Code 2014 is that ‘all Local Authorities publish all the information possible on Electronic Property Information Mapping Service’ (E-Pims). E-Pims is the central database of Government Central Civil Estate properties and land. It records the precise location of property, along with information such as landlord details, lease data and usage.
- 2.8 Users are able to find properties on an electronic map, amend their own property details, and use the system to search for vacant space.
- 2.9 Updating property information is mandatory for all:
- government departments
 - non-ministerial departments and their executive agencies
 - arm’s length bodies
 - non-departmental public bodies
 - special health authorities

The following bodies do not have to update their information:

- the NHS (except for special health authorities)
 - public corporations
 - privatised railways
 - Crown Estate
 - Defence Estate (subject to some exceptions)
- 2.10 In May 2016 DCLG opened further consultation on the Transparency Code, Strengthening Local Government Transparency: Consultation on changes to the local government transparency code.
- 2.11 Within this consultation there are proposals to change the way that local authorities record details of their land and property assets. The consultation proposes that ‘the Code be modified to require the annual publication of land and building asset data to E-Pims, rather than to local authority websites’. As a result some of the considered benefits of doing so are:
- access to data on central government land and buildings creating collaboration between central and wider public sector
 - advance information of surplus land before it is disposed of outside of government
 - detailed property searching and mapping, including land registry titles of all land packages and vacant land and property
 - free access for all users - local authorities will not have to establish their own systems at their own cost
 - standardised and consistent data capture, which allows for better estate planning and management between public sector bodies
 - benchmarking capability

Local Authorities have until July 2016 to respond to this latest consultation.

- 2.12 As a result of this latest Transparency Code consultation, as well as developing work to progress a One Public Estate bid for September 2016, the Asset Strategy team on behalf of the Head of Physical Assets, made contact with the District and Boroughs to obtain their views on agreeing to publish asset data to E-Pims, in advance of the proposed changes to the Transparency Agenda.
- 2.13 To date, the response to this request from the Districts and Boroughs has been limited. With one district, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, so far responding; indicating that they publish their data to E-Pims and that they do so as a result of their membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority.
- 2.14 In terms of what has been achieved, as a result of the collaborative working with our Public Sector partners we have co-located at the following properties:-
- Warwick Shire Hall – asset owned by WCC
 - Warwick Saltisford (MASH) – asset owned by WCC
 - Stratford Elizabeth House - asset owned by SDC
 - Atherstone Council House - asset owned by NWBC
 - Alcester Globe House – asset owned by SDC
 - Warwick Riverside House – asset owned by WDC
 - Warwickshire Police have a presence at many of WCC’s assets for use by Community Support officers
 - Warwickshire Direct have established hubs at many of WCC’s assets.
- 2.15 If the proposed revisions to the Transparency Code are approved, this would enforce all Local Authorities to publish their asset listings to E-Pims. The benefits of doing so are clear and would enable E-Pims to become the common public property asset register. The Head of Physical Assets will pursue publishing Warwickshire County Councils assets to E-Pims and will encourage other public sector partners within Warwickshire to do so, until such a point that it is mandatory.

3.0 Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal is to build on the work that has already been undertaken; to enable a joined up approach as well as to gain impetus and momentum. That a Warwickshire Forum is explored across the public sector in Warwickshire, to agree an approach to ensuring that all assets lists are published to E-Pims and to enable all asset data within Warwickshire to be shared with other Public Sector Bodies.
- 3.2 It is also proposed that once all Warwickshire Asset Data is available on E-Pims that the Sub Regional Asset Map held on Atlasweb is decommissioned and no longer maintained by Warwickshire County Council.

- 3.3 As a result of sharing asset information on E-Pims the Warwickshire Forum will identify and develop opportunities across the wider public estate and develop an Asset Strategy for Warwickshire.
- 3.4 This Warwickshire Asset Strategy should use the data shared across all public bodies to identify vacant space, surplus land and other opportunities that will enable a co-ordinated approach to be taken. It will:
- Be the driver for delivering projects for the greater public good, rather than for the individual body.
 - Provide a consistent and co-ordinated approach to asset management across Warwickshire
 - Identify opportunities to deliver savings and provide economic growth that enables Warwickshire to prosper

4.0 Timescales

- 4.1 To develop a Warwickshire Forum by October 2016
- 4.2 To report back on progress to the Resources and Fire and Rescue Committee in October 2016
- 4.3 To ensure that all Assets lists are published and made available on E-Pims by December 2016
- 4.4 To develop a Warwickshire Asset Strategy by April 2017

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s):

Other members: Councillors Appleton, N Davies, Dirveiks, Fowler, Horner, Kaur, Morris-Jones and Western