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Heritage modernisation

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper updates the Board on joint work with English Heritage and heritage/conservation professional groups on how to ensure a focus on heritage and conservation outcomes as budgets reduce.

Recommendations

For the Board to discuss.

Action

Officers to take forward members' views.

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Background

1. Budget reductions mean that historic environment services are facing significant challenges in many places. Beneath the familiar headlines about trying to do “more with less”, services will often need to work in new and different ways even to achieve the same outcomes.
2. With English Heritage, and in partnership with the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers, the Institute of Historic Building Conservation, and the Planning Officers’ Society, we are offering support to areas who are rethinking their heritage services. This follows a very successful event, in partnership with the Princes Regeneration Trust at St James Palace in February, which highlighted the risk to local heritage buildings and at which Baroness Eaton and Baroness Andrews (Chair, English Heritage) launched the broad offer of support.
3. Our aim is to support local leadership on the new ways of providing heritage and conservation services and to spread the lessons across the sector.
4. Some councils are seeking to focus on strategic heritage outcomes, reduce unnecessary and costly bureaucracy and process, pool resources across public bodies, and engage civic societies and communities more effectively in the task of protecting the heritage. In the first phase of the initiative, we will support a number of places to adapt the way services are provided in order to meet the new pressures. We want specifically to encourage and help places develop new models of delivery; greater streamlining of processes; more effective focus on protecting the feel of places and their heritage rather than on bureaucracy; and greater burden-sharing through creative partnership working. In particular, we want to support places that are developing their own ideas and models.
5. In response to a joint invitation for expressions of interest from Baroness Eaton and Baroness Andrews (Chair, English Heritage) 18 responses were received plus one from the Historic Towns Forum. These were assessed by an expert officer panel and at this stage, support will be offered to five places – Cheltenham Borough Council, West Sussex (including the county council, South Downs National Park Authority and districts), Cotswold AONB (led by Cotswold District Council), Essex County Council and Northumberland County Council.
6. Some of the support will be in kind, using English Heritage’s officer resource and the LG Group’s network of sector peers, and some in cash, allowing the hiring of independent expertise or facilitation where that is needed. By the end

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of the first phase, we hope to have made a contribution to the places developing their own models for the future and being ready to implement them.

7. We will then share the first-phase places' learning with other authorities as the second phase of the project, aiming to drive the wider change agenda within the sector by building on this base of locally-developed, bottom-up change.

Financial Implications

8. The Group will make a small contribution to the costs of the project within the Budget set by the Group Executive on 19 May.