

BUSINESS AND TRANSFORMATION SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 3 AUGUST 2017 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Riddle (Chairman), Councillors Allison, Mrs Birks, Mrs Bowman, Mrs Glendinning, Mallinson J, Robson (until 12noon) and Watson (until 1.05pm).

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Glover – Leader (for part of the meeting)
Councillor Dr Tickner – Deputy Leader, and Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder
Councillor Mrs Warwick – Observer
Mr Finnan – Head of Asset Management at Chancerygate

OFFICERS: Town Clerk and Chief Executive
Deputy Chief Executive
Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services
Chief Finance Officer
Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager
Strategic Asset Investment Services Manager
Customer Services Manager
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

BTSP.01/17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence submitted.

BTSP.02/17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Allison declared an interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of Agenda Item A.8 – Amendment to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy. The interest related to the fact that his son and daughter were in receipt of Discretionary Rate Relief.

BTSP.03/17 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED - It was agreed that the items of business in Part A be dealt with in public and Part B be dealt with in private.

BTSP.04/17 AGENDA

RESOLVED – It was agreed that agenda items A.9 and B.1 Asset Management of Kingstown Industrial Estate and Parkhouse Business Park – Response to the Proposed Business Plan be considered as the first items on the agenda.

BTSP.05/17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 13 April 2017, which had been approved by Council on 11 July 2017, be signed by the Chairman.

BTSP.06/17 CALL - IN OF DECISIONS

There were no items which had been the subject of call-in.

**BTSP.07/17 ASSET MANAGEMENT OF KINGSTOWN INDUSTRIAL ESTATE AND
PARKHOUSE BUSINESS PARK – RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED
BUSINESS PLAN**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Finnan, Head of Asset Management, Chancerygate to the meeting.

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services submitted report GD.48/17 considering the proposed Business Plan for the future management and development of Kingstown Industrial Estate and Parkhouse Business Park. The financial and commercially sensitive aspects of the Business Plan would be considered when the Panel moved into private session later in the meeting.

The report detailed the background to the procurement exercise which had led to a five year management contract being agreed with property management specialists Chancerygate in October 2016 to manage the property assets at Kingstown and Parkhouse Estates. Since that agreement Chancerygate had been working on the development of the Business Plan and managing the day to day requirements of the contract.

The proposals contained within the Chancerygate Business Plan were designed to deliver on the Council's objectives for the estates as laid out in the procurement prospectus, details of which were provided.

The proposed Business Plan had been organised into four distinct areas, namely Estate Strategy; Development Strategy; Communications Strategy; and Marketing Strategy. Those were outlined at Section 2 to the report and covered in detail within the proposed Business Plan. Each option would be considered on its merits.

RESOLVED – That report GD.48/17 Asset Management of Kingstown Industrial Estate and Parkhouse Business Park – Response to the Proposed Business be noted.

BTSP.08/17 PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Public and Press were excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph number (as indicated in brackets against the minute) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Local Government Act.

**BTSP.09/17 ASSET MANAGEMENT OF KINGSTOWN INDUSTRIAL ESTATE AND
PARKHOUSE BUSINESS PARK – RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSED
BUSINESS PLAN**

(Public and Press excluded by virtue of Paragraph 3)

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services submitted private report GD.48/17 outlining the commercially sensitive and financial aspects of the proposals set out in the public report considered earlier in the meeting.

The Executive had considered the matter at their meeting on 3 July 2017 (Minute Excerpt EX.59/17 refers) and sought the views of the Panel.

Mr Finnan, Chancerygate, gave a presentation which set out in detail the objectives of the Business Plan, the development strategy and opportunities for the estates and the key performance indicators

Mr Finnan responded to Members questions clarifying proposals for the Industrial Estate and Business Park, improvement works to undertaken, historical issues regarding parking and litter, rent reviews and investment plans.

The Panel supported the business plan and asked that careful consideration be given the mix of retail and leisure offer in the Industrial Estate and Business Park so that it did not negatively impact the City Centre.

RESOLVED – 1) That report GD.48/17 (Private) Asset Management of Kingstown Industrial Estate and Parkhouse Business Park – Response to the Proposed Business be noted.

2) That the Panel receive a progress report on the Business Plan in six months' time.

3) That Mr Finnan be thanked for the clear well written business plan and detailed presentation.

The meeting moved back into public.

BTSP.10/17 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.17/17 providing an overview of matters relating to the work of the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel.

The Notice of Executive Key Decisions had been published on 30 June 2017 and the following items fell within the remit of the Panel and had been included in the Panel's Work Programme:

KD.07/17 – The Medium Term Financial Plan (including the Corporate Charging Policy) and the Capital Strategy 2018/19 to 2022/23

KD.08/17 – The Asset Management Plan 2017 to 2022

KD.14/17 – Kingstown Industrial Estate – Management Arrangements

The report included a copy of minute excerpt EX.53/17 Street Trading Policy from the Executive meeting on 3 July 2017.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reminded the Panel that the City Council had, on 11 July 2017, agreed to change the names and the remits of the Scrutiny Panels:

Community Overview and Scrutiny Panel —→ Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel

Environment and Economy Overview and —→ Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel

Scrutiny Panel

Resources Overview and Scrutiny Panel —→ Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel

He highlighted section 3 of the report which set out the parts of the remit which had changed for the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer stressed the importance of Scrutiny being Member led and drew attention to the possible areas of focus for the work programme as set out in appendix 1 of the report. He asked that the Panel give consideration to their priorities for the next financial year.

The Panel discussed the suggestions as detailed in the report and the Town Clerk and Chief Executive commented that the Panel could add value to the authority by helping to shape and develop robust policies. He suggested that the Panel scrutinise Customer Services which would cover workflow and new technology.

The Panel agreed that Customer Services, Customer Contact Strategy and the Community Asset Transfer Policy be added to their work programme.

Following a suggestion from a Member the Panel agreed that the Sickness Absence monitoring report be programmed into the work programme on a bi-annual basis. They agreed that matters that were presented to the Panel on a regular basis would be monitored and consideration would be given to reducing regular reports or scrutinising them on an exception only basis.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Key Decision items relevant to the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel (OS.17/17) be noted.

2) That the following matters be added to the Work Programme for the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel:

- Customer Services
- Customer Contact Strategy
- Community Asset Transfer Policy

3) That the Sickness Absence Report be considered by the Panel on a bi-annual basis.

BTSP.11/17 DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2018/19 TO 2022/23

The Chief Finance Officer reported (RD.14/17) on the draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2018/19 to 2022/23, which set out the current framework for planning and managing the Council's financial resources, developing its annual budget strategy and updating its current five year financial plan. The Plan further sought to link the key aims and objectives of the Council, as contained in the Carlisle Plan, to the availability of resources thereby enabling the Council to prioritise the allocation of resources to best meet its overall aims and objectives.

In terms of the key messages, the Chief Finance Officer explained that the MTFP showed the starting position for budget considerations for the next five years and gave an indication of the likely factors that would have an impact in the budget setting process.

Key to those considerations would be:

- Achievement of transformation savings;
- Further reductions in government grant, e.g. New Homes Bonus, Housing Benefit Administration Grant;
- Further consideration of the move to 100% Business Rate Retention and the added responsibilities that may be passed on to the Council, as well as future resets of Business Rate Retention Scheme. Further guidance from the DCLG was anticipated on the Business Rate Retention Scheme to inform the budget process.

As well as some significant pressures, there was scope for some additional savings and additional income opportunities to be considered as part of the budget process. Those considerations were likely to be around Business Rate Retention Growth and Pooling; and refinancing / repayment of Stock Issue loan in 2020.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder added that Members comments from previous years had been acknowledged and work was being undertaken to improve the consultation process and to make the reports easier to understand.

In considering the Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2018/19 to 2022/23 Members raised the following comments and questions:

- The financial principles applied to the MTFP included consideration of the impact of the decision to leave the European Union; how would the Council obtain clear advice on the matter?

The Chief Finance Officer responded that Government announcements would be monitored closely for information and advice.

- A Member asked that the following amendments to the report be given some consideration:
an alternative symbol or colour to highlight positive or negative figures;
a reduction to the number of tables repeated in the document;
a reduction in the amount of explanatory information;
the addition of an executive summary.
- What were the additional cost pressures that needed to be recognised in order to provide services?

The Chief Finance Officer clarified that the potential cost pressures which could include any Government initiatives, new housing developments which the authority would have to service or new initiatives the Council may become involved in.

- What possibilities were being considered for the future of the Cumbria Business Rates Pool following 2020?

The Chief Finance Officer explained that the matter was being monitored but it was likely that there would be no need for a Business Rates Pool after 2020.

- Was the increase in the redevelopment costs for the Leisure Facilities due to flood resilience?

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive clarified that the capital programme assumed £5million towards the cost of the redevelopment. A business case had not been prepared for the proposed redevelopment and the capital programme assumption figure was five years old. There had not been any consideration of flood resilience at this point.

- How would the savings in table 5 of the report be achieved and would the projected savings of £400,000 from Rethinking Waste be delivered?

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder informed the Panel that work was due to begin on the projected savings by the Cross Party Working Group and the result of the work would be included in the budget process.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2018/19 to 2022/23 be welcomed;

2) That the Panel commend the efforts being made by officers to address issues regarding consultation and the clarity of the budget reports and look forward to seeing clearer, more easily understood documents in this year's budget consultation process;

3) That the comments and observations of the Panel, as detailed above, be submitted to the Executive.

The Chief Finance Officer reported (RD.15/17) on the Draft Capital Strategy 2018/19 to 2022/23, which was a key policy document providing guidance on the Council's Capital Programme and the use of resources. The Capital Strategy was reviewed annually alongside the Medium Term Financial Plan, commencing with the assumptions made in the Budget Resolution approved by Council on 7 February 2017. The position had been updated to reflect any known changes since that date.

The Chief Finance Officer drew attention to the financial principles which supported the Capital Strategy as detailed in section 2 of the Strategy.

The Executive had considered the draft Capital Strategy at their meeting on 31 July 2017 (EX.62/17 refers) and made it available for consideration by the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel.

In considering the draft Capital Strategy Members raised the following comments and questions:

- What was the timescale for bringing the details of the Leisure Contract funding to the Panel?

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the analysis of the bids was being finalised and the Panel would receive a report regarding the preferred partner in the Autumn.

- When would the £10,000 allocated to Kingstown Industrial Estate Roads be used?

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services responded that the budget would be used to change the signage in the Industrial Estate in the coming months.

- A Member asked that the term 'over borrowing' be made clearer in the reports or that alternative terminology be used.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Draft Capital Strategy 2018/19 to 2022/23 (RD.15/17) be welcomed;

2) That the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel receive an update on the Leisure Contract at the appropriate time;

3) That the comments and observations of the Panel, as detailed above, be submitted to the Executive.

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services presented report GD.49/17 concerning the draft Asset Management Plan 2017 – 2022.

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that asset sales had exceeded the original projections; and that to date 38 assets had been sold realising total gross receipts of circa £10.5 million. Overall the returns showed an increase of approximately 14% above the Business Plan estimates for those assets.

The Executive had considered the draft Asset Management Plan at their meeting on 31 July 2017 (EX.63/17 refers) and

"1. Noted the position as set out in Report GD.42/17.

2. Approved the update to the draft Asset Management Plan in order for it to proceed for consideration by the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel, before coming back to the Executive and full Council in September 2017."

In considering the draft Asset Management Plan the Panel made the following comments and questions:

- A Member commented that the work at West Walls had been successful, although felt there was still some issues regarding the steps. He asked what the budgeted £20,000 would be used for.

The Strategic Asset Investment Services Manager explained that the £20,000 had been budgeted for a programme of repointing and repairs along West Walls and the programme was now in its final year. He added that the steps were the responsibility of Cumbria County Council and he understood that they were undertaking some work on them.

- Why had the Enterprise Centre been moved from being managed as an Economic Development asset to being managed as part of the investment portfolio?

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services commented that the Enterprise Centre had been a difficult building for the Council to manage and no longer operated as a business incubation centre. The building had been moved into the property portfolio and would be managed as an asset. In the long term consideration would need to be given to the future of the building.

- A Member asked for an update on the opportunities around the Citadel area.

The Corporate Director explained that the Citadel was a long term project which the Corporate Director of Economic Development was dealing with. Any work in the area would require several organisations working together as the City Council did not own all of the assets in the area.

- What plans for asset disposal were in place for 2017/18?

The Strategic Asset Investment Services Manager responded that Property Services had been focussed on residential sites; they had been dealing with any potential issues with the sites prior to disposal to ensure the maximum receipt for the assets.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder commended Property Services for their excellent work in achieving 14% above the business plan estimates for assets whilst reinstating other assets following the 2015 flood.

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services echoed the Portfolio Holder's comments congratulating Property Services on delivering a significant return on assets whilst dealing with the effect of the flood.

A Member also congratulated Property Services on the work they had undertaken on Durranshill Industrial Estate which had resulted in full occupancy of the site.

- How would the potential for Community Asset Transfer (CAT) be integrated into the Asset Management Plan?

The Strategic Asset Investment Services Manager explained that a CAT Policy was being developed and options were being investigated for the lease transfer of some assets whilst retaining them in the Council's portfolio.

- What performance measures were in place for the Asset Management Plan and were they available for the Panel to scrutinise?

The Strategic Asset Investment Services Manager responded that previous performance indicators had been removed nationally as they were no longer relevant and had been difficult to use for comparative purposes. The Asset Management Plan relied on the valuations of assets but further information could be added to future reports.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Draft Asset Management Plan 2017 to 2022 (GD.49/17) be welcomed;

2) That the Community Asset Transfer Policy be added to the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel's work programme;

3) That Property Services be congratulated for their work in achieving excellent returns on assets whilst reinstating Council assets following Storm Desmond in 2015.

4) That the comments and observations of the Panel, as detailed above, be submitted to the Executive.

BTSP.14/17 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT / ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REGULATIONS REQUESTS 2016/2017

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services presented report GD.46/17 which provided the Panel with a review of the Council's processing of Freedom of Information Act / Environmental Information regulations requests during the 2016/17 financial year.

The Corporate Director reminded the Panel of the Council's obligation to respond to requests for information received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Environmental Information regulations 2004 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

He drew the Panel's attention to the number of requests received and responded to along with the number/percentage of requests completed within statutory timescales.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- A Member commented that the report did not include any financial implications.

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services responded that it was impossible to ascertain the cost to each service; however, there was provision for refusing a request if it was deemed too expensive to respond. Eleven refusals had occurred due to cost implications.

- Was there any performance information available to enable comparisons between the City Council and other local authorities?

The Corporate Director explained that there was no comparison data available, however, as detailed in the report, should the City Council attract complaints regarding late responses the Information Commissioner's Officer could put the Council on a 'watch list' and monitor their performance. The City Council was not subject to any such scrutiny.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder congratulated the Corporate Information Team for dealing with the 716 requests promptly. He explained that the authority was trying to reduce the number of requests by ensuring that as much information as possible was available on the internet, this also reduced the time spent responding to requests.

The Panel discussed options for future reporting and agreed that the report would be scrutinised in future on an exception only basis.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Freedom of Information Act/Environmental Information Regulations requests 2016/17 report (GD.46/17) be noted.

2) That the Corporate Information Team be thanked for their work in responding to requests to the authority for information;

3) That future reports on information requests be submitted for scrutiny on an exception only basis.

BTSP.15/17 ASSET RECOVERY – CIVIC CENTRE

The Deputy Chief Executive presented report CS.19/17 which outlined the proposals for the reinstatement of the Civic Centre following the December 2015 floods along with a range of other plans for the whole site.

The Deputy Chief Executive reminded the Panel of the wide spread damage which Storm Desmond had caused to the Civic Centre and of the temporary measures which had been in place since 2016.

During the period in question a number of Civic Centre occupants had moved out of the building and although those moves were planned before the flood event the storm damage accelerated the departure plans of the organisations. In addition to the storm damage and reduction in 'let space' the Council had also significantly reduced its workforce during the past five years. When combined, those factors had led to a wholesale review of the future use of the operational asset.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that, following the first phase of recovery from Storm Desmond, Officers had undertaken an internal high level review of options for the Council's future civic, customer and office needs. The review examined the current costs of occupying the Civic Centre, the potential for moving to another suitable building and the future changes that would be required to make the authority's occupation of the Civic Centre a more viable proposition in the future.

The review concluded that the Council's current occupational costs for the Civic Centre were circa £750k per annum and further to that the building had approximately 15k-20ksqft of space to let (equivalent to 3 / 4 floors of the civic tower). The internal review also highlighted that the Civic Centre had permanent functional areas such as the Chamber which were not in frequent use and were therefore expensive to maintain and use.

Following a review of the Council's primary needs it was decided to proceed with recovery of the Civic Centre. Officers were asked to develop plans that would address the following objectives:

- Delivery of a new resilient, demountable, flexible ground floor space that could meet the current and future needs of the Council and its current and potential future partners.
- Zero use of basement with the consequential removal of all building services from that area.
- Improved access to the whole building, its primary services and via partnering a potential hub approach to public sector services.
- Reduced total building costs via partnering and better use of space across the site

With those objectives in mind Officers had worked with WYG (who were already commissioned for all Council flood recovery projects) to produce the plans which were displayed on screen for the Panel.

The Executive had considered the report at their meeting on 31 July 2017 (EX.74/17 refers) and resolved:

“That the Executive

1. Had considered and reviewed the layout and design features of the proposals contained within Report CS.18/17 both for the ground floor reinstatement and the other plans for the whole site.

2.Had reviewed the proposals for funding those proposals using the City Council's insurance settlement, capital programme and the proposed 'invest to save' initiative.

3. Had reviewed the section outlining the One Public Estate programme and its potential contribution to the project and, subject to the views of the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel, supported the plans to prepare an Expression of Interest on behalf of key partners outlined in the body of the report. That the Executive had reviewed the proposals to commit capital budget to undertake a pre-planned repair and maintenance programme in the Civic Tower designed to improve the quality and flexibility of the office floor space and improve the Council's potential for leasing the space. That the Executive made the report available to the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel for their considered views and comments before formulating any final decisions arising from the report.

In considering the proposals Members raised the following comments and questions:

- How would the public access the proposed new Council Chamber?

The Strategic Asset Investment Services Manager explained that all public access would be ground floor level through the main entrance. The draft plan showed that the space in the existing chamber could be accommodated in the new area; it would change as the plans developed.

- A Member had concerns that the proposed plans would not be wholly financed by the insurance money and questioned how the public would feel about the authority building a new council chamber.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive explained that it was important to consider the proposals for a new chamber alongside the opportunity to demolish the existing chamber and introduce more car parking in a premium car park in the City which would generate income. The change would be economically sensible. In addition the chamber was not being used regularly and was not accessible to all. The proposed chamber would be a flexible space which could be used for a variety of activities including the Election count which would achieve savings.

- There was some concern that soft meeting areas would not afford the public the appropriate level of privacy.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive highlighted the design of the tower of the civic centre and the difficulties staff had in interacting due to the design. The soft meeting areas afforded staff space to hold meetings and interact.

The Deputy Chief Executive agreed that private meeting space was also important and drew the Panel's attention to the rooms which had been included in the design.

- Why was the telephony system being placed on the ground floor?

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive responded that the telephony equipment would be wi-fi enabled and not hard wired, this would enable the system to be removed if required.

- Why had Cumbria County Council moved out of the Civic Centre?

The Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services explained that the terms of their occupancy had been set by operation of law. In 1974 the authority changed and the services the previous authority held automatically went to the new authority, this included the occupancy by Cumbria County Council. The loss to the City Council had been Cumbria County Council's contribution to operational costs.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder reminded the Panel that the proposals were in principle designs. The funding was in place and the designs would go out to tender. He assured the Panel that the ground floor would be designed to budget unless an opportunity for an invest to save scheme came forward. He added that the whole design of the ground floor was to ensure as much of the space as possible would be demountable.

- A Member felt that it would be beneficial to showcase the One Public Estate (OPE) Programme and commented that he supported the project and the opportunities it offered.
- How would the Panel be involved in the process for the ground floor work?

The Finance, Governance and resources Portfolio Holder explained that the matter would go back to the Executive who would consider Scrutiny's comments before making a recommendation to full Council.

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive added that once the decision had been made regarding the in principle design any call on budgets would go through the decision making process. He reminded the Panel that they had the opportunity to call in any Executive decisions which they were not happy with.

- A Member commented that the existing chamber was no longer fit for purpose and the proposed chamber would be more accessible and used more, she added that although she supported improvements to the entrance she felt that the proposed designs were stark and asked that they be considered further.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Asset Recovery – Civic Centre report and flythrough (CS.19/17) be welcomed;

2) That the Panel supports the proposed designs and demolition of the octagon in principle.

3) That the comments and observations of the Panel, as detailed above, be submitted to the Executive.

BTSP.16/17 STANDING ORDERS

During consideration of the above item it was noted that the meeting had been in progress for 3 hours and it was moved, seconded and RESOLVED that Council Procedure Rule 9, in relation to the duration of meetings be suspended in order that the meeting could continue over the time limit of 3 hours.

BTSP.17/17 AMENDMENT TO THE DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY

The Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager reported (CE.10/17) that discretionary rate relief was granted under the Council's policy in accordance with legislative provisions within Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and subsequent amendments.

In response to the national revaluation of business rates which had taken effect from 1 April 2017, the Government had announced additional support measures for businesses as a result of the changes to rateable values for certain groups of businesses, especially those adversely

affected by the revaluation. Accordingly the Council's Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Statement needed amendment to include the new relief schemes so that assistance could be provided.

The schemes introduced were announced in the Spring Budget in March 2017, however, detailed guidance and clarification of the proposals was delayed due to the General Election but had now been confirmed.

The Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager outlined in some detail the following relief measures:

- Newspaper Relief – Support through a discount of up to £1,500 a year for 2 years for office space used by a local newspaper based on one discount per title.
- Support for Pubs - A £1,000 discount for eligible public houses with a rateable value of up to £100,000.
- Supporting Small Businesses - Relief for ratepayers facing large increases following the loss of small business rates or rural relief. Either a fixed percentage increase per year would apply or the bill increase would be capped at £600 per year for up to five years from 2017/18 to 2021/22.
- Targeted Support - From a £300m national discretionary fund, Carlisle had been allocated funding of £340,000 over a period of 4 years. Authorities had discretion to grant support to the most adversely affected and hard pressed businesses affected by the revaluation.

Members' attention was drawn to the eligibility criteria (determined to most effectively target the limited cash funds available), key conditions, proposals for the award of funding, and exclusions applicable to the Targeted Support Scheme set out at Section 2.

The Executive had considered the report at their meeting on 31 July 2017 (EX.65/17 refers) and:

- “1. Approved the proposed revised draft Discretionary Rate Relief Policy as shown in Appendix 1 to Report CE.10/17 for consultation purposes.
2. Noted considerations for delegation to the Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager in point 2.4 of the Report.”

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- A Member commented that it was sensible to take the approach for the division of the available funds as detailed in the report to enable those who most needed the support to benefit from the award.
- Why did newspapers get relief?

The Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager clarified that relief for newspapers had been determined by central Government. Newspapers could only register their title in one place, however, if one newspaper operated under several titles they had the opportunity to receive rate relief at multiple properties.

- How are small businesses informed of the rate relief?

The Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager explained that small businesses had been subject to a national revaluation; as a result affected businesses who met the criteria were issued with an amended, discounted bill.

- What would the effect of the exit from the EU have on the Policy?

The Revenues and Benefits Operations Manager responded that it was expected that any EU law would move in to British law then information would be circulated by Government.

- A Member commented that it would be useful for the report to include a flow chart which illustrated the type of businesses eligible for relief.

REOLVED – 1) That the amendment to the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy April 2017 (CE.11/17) be welcomed;

2) That the comments and observations of the Panel, as detailed above, be submitted to the Executive.

(The meeting ended at 1.35pm)