

ECONOMIC GROWTH SCRUTINY PANEL

16 JANUARY 2020 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Councillor Brown (Chair), Councillors, Denholm, Meller, Mitchelson, McKerrell, McNulty (as substitute for Councillor Mrs Atkinson), and Rodgerson.

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor J Mallinson – Leader
Councillor Ellis – Deputy Leader and Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder
Councillor Christian – Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder
Councillor Nedved – Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder
Mr Mounsey – Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Manager (Environment Agency)
Mr Lawton – Senior Flood and Coastal Risk Management Adviser (Environment Agency)

OFFICERS: Corporate Director of Economic Development
Policy and Communications Manager
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

EGSP.01/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Atkinson.

EGSP.02/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

EGSP.03/20 PUBLIC AND PRESS

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

EGSP.04/20 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

RESOLVED – It was noted that Council, at its meeting on 7 January 2020, received and adopted the minutes of the meetings held on 17 October and 28 November 2019. The Chair signed the minutes.

EGSP.05/20 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

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

EGSP.06/20 FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The Policy and Communications Manager submitted report PC.03/20 which provided an overview of Flood Risk Management Scheme and Cumbria Strategic Flood Partnership's work: he introduced Mr Mounsey, Flood and Coastal Erosion Manager, Environment Agency and Mr Lawton, Senior Adviser, Environment Agency to the Panel.

Mr Mounsey and Mr Lawton gave a presentation covering: the Carlisle Scheme objectives and how the scheme was to be assessed; the programme of works for each phase; the areas comprising the three different phases of work being undertaken; updates on the progress in

each phase; risks and opportunities associated with the scheme; work being undertaken in other areas of the district, and the longer term strategy for flood defence in the city.

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

- What level of flood protection would the works currently being undertaken provide to the district?

Mr Lawton responded that when the works were finalised the defences would offer protection against a 1 in 200 year flood event. The scheme currently under construction had an expected lifetime of more than 100 years, at the end of which it was anticipated that the defences would provide protection against a 1 in 75 year event. As Climate Change continued to progress more intense rainfall events would be experienced more commonly, thus a Storm Desmond event was likely, over time become comparatively more the norm.

- Was the area around Botcherby Bridge fully flood protected whilst it was being reinstated to pre-works condition?

Mr Lawton confirmed that the area in the vicinity of Botcherby Bridge were at the agreed Standard Of Protection (SOP), as the reinstatement related to minor repairs following works.

Responding to a further question from a Member regarding dredging of the river Petteril near Botcherby Bridge, Mr Lawton stated that none had taken place nor was any dredging planned as survey work had revealed a main sewer was situated at the riverbed. Such an infrastructure constraint meant such works were not feasible, however, reprofiling works would be undertaken on the bank at that section of the Petteril which would improve flow.

A Member asked whether the Agency undertook dredging work elsewhere.

The works required to manage and maintain watercourses were set out in Management Plans which, depending on the nature of the river, may include gravel removal. In some instances that was not necessary as the channels began to incise. Were any obvious problems with gravel accumulation to occur, the Agency would take steps to address that.

- How many local companies were involved in delivering the scheme?

Mr Mounsey explained that the Agency's contract for the work was with Volker Stevin, a Preston based company, it was expected that the main contractors would sub-contract work out to smaller local firms as part of the project delivery. Given the county's large geographic scale, it was likely that a number of local contractors would be used.

A Member commented that local firms had been involved in the Agency's works in and around the Botcherby area, he noted that those working on the project helped with the community understanding the works as they were able to communicate it to family and friends etc.

Mr Mounsey thanked the Member for the information and stated that he would feed that detail back to colleagues at the Agency.

- When weather prevented work at a particular location, were teams reassigned to work upstream?

Mr Lawton stated it was likely that in such cases teams would be redirected to work on part of another phases, for example, workers unable to carry out their duties in relation to a Phase 1 site may be redirected to participate in the preparation works for Phase 2.

The Chairman noted the tight timescale for the construction aspect of the Phase 2 scheme and that it ran in parallel with work in the Phase 1 scheme, she asked what the impact of not securing Planning Permission for Phase 2 would have on the project timetable and whether the Agency had sufficient resources to deliver both phases in tandem.

Mr Lawton confirmed that the Agency had sufficient resources to run both Phases concurrently.

In terms of a delay, as a result of not securing Planning Permission he advised that the impact on the timetable would depend on the reason(s) permission was refused. It was hoped that the application would be assessed as a Statutory application which had an eight week determination period, rather than a Major application which had a thirteen week determination period.

The Corporate Director commented that the Agency were well versed in submitting planning applications and undertook effective pre-application discussions with the Council which was an opportunity for any potential issues to be highlighted and where necessary for appropriate mitigation to be identified and incorporated into a scheme.

All planning applications were subject to a twenty-one day consultation period, in the event of no objections being received, the application may be dealt with by an Officer under powers delegated to them by the Council's Constitution. In such a case, the determination period for the application may be less than eight weeks.

- The Chairman noted that following the 2005 flood event in the district work on defences commenced relatively quickly. It was now 5 years since Storm Desmond and some aspects of the flood resilience programme had not commenced, she asked why the works following Storm Desmond had taken longer.

Mr Lawton explained that work on a flood alleviation scheme for Carlisle had been set in motion prior to the 2005 flood event. The process for developing schemes had several phases including; survey; design; business case development, and assurance, all of which took time to process correctly.

Mr Mounsey added that it was important that the right schemes were identified, developed and delivered, were a scheme not to be right it had the potential to generate public liability concerns for the Agency.

- What level of influence did interest groups such as Carlisle Flood Action Group have on the Agency's plans and projects for the district?

Organisations such as the Carlisle Flood Action Group acted as a critical friend to the Agency who discussed, commented on and provided feedback on proposals. It was noted that interest groups often had a particular vision, or wanted specific works undertaken which the Agency was not always able to undertake.

A number of Members commented that it was important that the Agency made its community engagement activities as open access as possible so that all views on its proposals were taken on board and considered.

Mr Mounsey and Mr Lawton indicated their agreement. Whilst broad community engagement was an important factor in developing and delivering the scheme, it was recognised that not everyone would support each of the project being carried out.

- How could Elected Members support the Agency in making its community engagement available to a broad range of residents/businesses?

The Agency timetabled its community engagement activities in advance and aligned them to key points in the delivery of a project, for example prior to the submission of a planning application. Mr Lawton noted that the activities in residential areas such as Brunton Park had higher levels of attendance than activities around the Civic Centre where the residential population was lower. He invited suggestions from Members on locations for the next tranche of community engagement which was scheduled for March/April.

The Corporate Director undertook to circulate to Panel Members the dates of the next community engagement events.

- A Member asked how the responses received during community engagement activities influenced the Agency's work.

Mr Lawton explained that due to the Agency's processes and procedures for developing flood alleviation works, its community engagement work in the district was now more focussed on providing information rather than consultation.

Mr Mounsey noted that following flood events the Agency and the Lead Local Flood Authority (Cumbria County Council) were responsible for producing a Section 19 report which detailed the cause(s) and sequence of events that had occurred. Using the evidence and information contained in the Section 19 report as a baseline the Agency developed its current flood alleviation programme by: generating a list of Options; consulting on the Options; shortlisting the options; consultation on the shortlist; identify Preferred Options.

Once Preferred Options had been agreed more detailed preparation work was carried out on individual projects, each of which was presented to the Agency's internal Assurance Board to be assessed against the following criteria: economic viability; technical feasibility; public acceptability, and environmental sustainability. When a project was approved by the Board a Business Case was developed for submission to the Treasury: this aspect was crucial to drawing down central government funding. All of those processes had been carried out in Carlisle and had formed the flood alleviation programme that the Agency was currently seeking to provide in the area.

- What upstream water and land management projects were being undertaken with a view to reducing flood risk in the future?

Mr Mounsey outlined a number of schemes of that nature taking place Cumbria. They were currently small scale in nature, but it was hoped they could be learned from, and where appropriate incorporated into other areas in the future.

A Member noted that the Caldew upstream of Holme Head Weir had undergone significant changes, he asked what actions the Agency would take there to minimise flood risk.

Mr Lawton acknowledged the erosion and channel movement that had taken place on that part of the watercourse. None of those changes directly impacted the flood risk management

options for the city in relation to the Caldew River. The Agency was of the view that the city was able to be defended from flood events from that river by increasing the physical defences provided downstream from Holme Head Weir. The existing defences had primarily been installed on the right hand side of the river channel, the works carried out in Phase 3 of the overall Carlisle scheme would focus on the left hand side of the channel.

The River Caldew had not overtopped nor breached the existing defences during Storm Desmond: the lower level of impact on properties along with the technical difficulties of working in an area with numerous existing properties and infrastructure, that area of the city comprised the last phased stage of work as part of the scheme.

The Corporate Director of Economic Development commented that she was a member of the Cumbria Strategic Flood Partnership, and those representing the Upper Eden area were very conscious of the need to explore ways to manage the watercourse effectively throughout the entirety of its catchment area.

- How much funding had the Agency given to businesses for flood defences?

Mr Mounsey explained that the Agency did not provide monies directly to businesses, rather they were factored into the planning, design and business cases relating to the projects the Agency planned to deliver. He added that the Agency needed to consider how it would engage with the Local Enterprise Partnership and the Chamber of Commerce to increase flood resilience for businesses. Nationally, the Agency was lobbying government for a business fund to provide financial support to those businesses seeking to incorporate flood resilience measures at their premises.

The Corporate Director gave an overview of the Resilience Grants fund the Council on behalf of government after Storm Desmond, she further noted that government was being lobbied to make that a permanent fund rather than one only available in the aftermath of a flood event.

The Panel discussed the resilience works being self-funded and carried out by some of the larger businesses in the city who had previously been affected by flooding.

- Once government funding had been secured how long would it remain available for?

Mr Lawton responded that the government's spending review processes meant that any funds currently allocated to projects would need to be drawn down by March 2021. Therefore, contracts for works would need to be agreed by that time.

A Member noted that the government had allocated £25M for flood alleviation works, he questioned whether the entirety of that sum was available for Carlisle District.

Mr Mounsey advised that the £25m was a nation-wide allocation for distribution to individual projects.

The Chairman asked what certainty there was that the funding needed for the scheme in the district could be secured.

Mr Mounsey explained that the internal assurance processes undertaken in the Agency were well developed to support the production of effective business cases. Moreover, the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Agency considered Carlisle to be a key flood defence priority.

On that basis, Mr Mounsey was confident that the funds required to deliver the proposed scheme would be secured.

Another Member asked whether Councillors were able to help support the Agency's funding bids.

Mr Mounsey thanked the Member for the offer, he explained that the Agency worked closely with the Council's Town Clerk and Chief Executive and its Corporate Development of Economic Development regarding the Business Cases. Should letters of support or other items be required, that may be communicated to Members via those Officers.

RESOLVED – 1) That Mr Mounsey and Mr Lawton be thanked for the presentation and attendance at the meeting.

2) That Environment Agency staff be thanked for their works thus far on the Carlisle Flood Alleviation Scheme.

3) That the Corporate Director of Economic Development circulate the dates for the Environment Agency's next community engagement exercises to Members of the Panel.

4) That report PC.03/20 Flood Risk Management and Community Engagement be noted.

EGSP.07/20 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.32/19 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel. The Panel's 2019/20 Work Programme had been attached to the report for consideration.

That the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Key Decision items relevant to the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel (OS.32/19) be noted.

The report made reference to the most recent Notice of Executive Key Decisions (published on 17 December 2019), copies of which had been circulated to all Members and made available to the public on the Council's website. Two items within the remit of the Panel were included:

- Budget Process 2020/21 – 2045/25, the matter had been considered by the Panel at its meeting of 28 November 2019;
- Future High Street Fund (KD.24/19) – which was scheduled to be considered by the Panel at its meeting of 27 February 2020.

The Work Programme had been attached to the report, during discussion the Panel agreed the following amendments:

- That the Economic and Housing Strategy item earmarked for the 27 February meeting be removed and that a workshop on the draft strategy be arranged by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer in conjunction with the Corporate Director of Economic Development;
- That the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal / Key Projects reports scheduled for the April meeting be removed from the Programme.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Officer invite the Chairman of the Local Enterprise Partnership to attend the April meeting of the Panel where a report on the Partnership was to be presented.
- That the Overview and Scrutiny Officer make arrangements for a scoping meeting to be held with the Chairs of the Economic Growth and Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny prior to the Transport Joint Inquiry Day scheduled for Spring 2020.

RESOLVED – 1) That report OS.32/19 be received.

2) That the following amendment be made to the Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel's Work Programme:

- i) That the Economic and Housing Strategy item earmarked for the 27 February meeting be removed and that a workshop on the draft strategy be arranged by the Overview and Scrutiny Officer in conjunction with the Corporate Director of Economic Development;
- ii) That the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal / Key Projects reports scheduled for the April meeting be removed from the Programme.
- iii) That the Overview and Scrutiny Officer invite the Chairman of the Local Enterprise Partnership to attend the April meeting of the Panel where a report on the Partnership was to be presented.
- iv) That the Overview and Scrutiny Officer make arrangements for a scoping meeting to be held with the Chairs of the Economic Growth and Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny prior to the Transport Joint Inquiry Day scheduled for Spring 2020.

(The meeting ended at 11:45am)