BUSINESS AND TRANSFORMATION SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY 1 APRIL 2021 AT 4.00PM

PRESENT: Councillor Bainbridge (Chair), Councillors Alcroft, Allison, Birks, Bowman, Mitchelson and Dr Tickner.

ALSO
PRESENT: Councillor Ellis, Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder
Councillor Mrs Mallinson, Communities, Health and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder
Councillor Christian, Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Head of Digital and Technology
HR Advisor
Policy and Performance Officer
Overview and Scrutiny Officer

BTSP.25/21   APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Paton, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive and the Leader.

BTSP.26/21   DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest submitted.

BTSP.27/21   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.28/21   CALL IN OF DECISIONS

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

BTSP.29/21   CORPORATE PROJECT STATUS REPORT

The Deputy Chief Executive presented an update against corporate projects currently being undertaken in the Council (CE.01/21).

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

- A Member invited the Head of Digital and Technology to give an overview of the IT projects shown as red in the appended RAG report.

The Head of Digital and Technology advised that the majority of projects shown as red were related to infrastructure, for example the planned Windows 10 upgrade which had been affected by limited staffing resources. The 2008 server decommissioning was necessary as the technology was no longer supported by Microsoft; the project required collaboration with other service areas to enable migration to new servers and work was being undertaken to progress the matter. The service was currently negotiating new licence agreements with Microsoft which

would ensure fixed costs over a three year period and would future proof aspects of the IT services, such as cloud based servers and provide additional security.

In terms of the migration from use of the current intranet to SharePoint and the migration from H Drives to using the One Drive, those were large corporate projects which required input from other service areas such as how they required data to be shared and presented, GDPR compliance and data entry.

- A Member asked whether the need for additional in house resources necessitated the use of consultants to implement the projects.

The Head of Digital and Technology responded that due to the pace of change in IT engaging consultants was useful to assist in niche areas, but that they were not generally used in the delivery of regular service function. There was a need for additional resource within the team, therefore, the structure of team and a plan for the service for the next two to five years was being developed.

- The Member asked whether there was any capacity in neighbouring district authorities to assist with projects?

The Head of Digital and Technology confirmed that she had liaised with IT Service managers from adjacent Councils, but that they were in a similar situation in terms of staffing resource. She reiterated consultants were primarily used by the Council in relation to niche/specialist areas of work.

- In light of the Local Government Review in Cumbria, how compatible were the IT systems of the various districts and county council?

The Head of Digital and Technology explained that there was likely significant differences between the authorities, particularly in relation to back office infrastructure. A move to unitary authority would mean a large piece of work to harmonise systems. Initial discussions between the Cumbrian authorities had begun, and there were plans to meet with an authority that had already undergone the process of transitioning from dual to unitary Council to further understand the issues related to such a project. Whilst the final decision had not yet been taken in relation to local government structure in Cumbria, the scale of the work it would entail meant that work on the project was already being considered.

- The Chair asked whether the projects to be delivered by the IT service were supported by the Senior Management Team.

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the project delivery was supported by senior managers and noted the importance of IT to the Council.

- A Member requested that the Panel be provided with an updated report on the progress of the IT projects in three months' time.

The Head of Digital and Technology undertook to provide a report.

- With reference to the Public Realm Improvements, a Member asked whether the funding provided by MHCLG would pay for all the works under the Future High Streets fund or whether additional match funding would be required.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that the were a number of schemes within that project, some of which would be wholly funded by MHCLG monies, others would require additional financial support.

- Had the Discover England Fund Year Two project been paid for by the Council or finding from an external organisation?

The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that external funding had been received in two phases and that the second phase of the project which had been delayed by the Covid 19 pandemic. It was anticipated that further activity in relation to Phase 2 of the project would be delivered this year.

Responding to a further question from the Member on the benefits to the Council from the project, the Deputy Chief Executive gave an overview of the involvement of the Economic Development Team with the project. At the request of the Member he undertook to provide to the Panel the Lessons Learned report as part of its Work Programme.

- Given the issues and emerging risks listed in the RAG report for the St Cuthbert's Garden Village Masterplan, a Member felt that the project status could be considered amber.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that he understood the current work on the project was green. There was a distinction to be made between current work and future progress on the project, if activity on the project was to slow down in the future, the RAG rating would be reassessed. Information on the progress of the project would be reported through appropriate Member Groups e.g. the Members' Advisory Group.

The Member requested that additional information on the progress of the project be circulated to the Panel.

Another Member asked whether the team working on the St Cuthbert's Garden Village project was appropriately resourced with staff and whether they had the appropriate skill base to cover all aspect of the project.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that to his knowledge, all staff positions in the team were filled. Due to the nature of the work it would be necessary to use consultants for short term work in areas of particular expertise, as was common practice for local authorities.

- A Member commented that the One Public Estate Programme seemed to have considerably expanded.

The Deputy Chief Executive gave an overview of the governance and funding arrangements of the programme. Liaison with other authorities and public sector partners was a key aspect of the work and that it had the potential to become a catalyst for other projects.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Panel noted and commented on the most recent summary of projects and governance arrangements in place as contained in appendix 1, and the actions being taken to support projects with issues (CE.01/21).

2) That the Head of Digital and Technology provide an update report on the projects of the IT service in three months' time.

3) That the Deputy Chief Executive provide additional information to the Panel on the progress of the St Cuthbert's Garden Village Masterplan project to the Panel.

4) That the Deputy Chief Executive circulate the lessons learned report regarding the Discover England Fund Year Two project to the Panel.

BTSP.30/21   CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted an update on the management of the Council's Corporate Risk Register (CS.19/21). No risks had been escalated up the RAG rating, the Corporate Risk relating to a no deal Brexit had been removed from the register.

The Deputy Chief Executive detailed the progress made by the Corporate Risk Management Group (CRMG) since September 2020. He reported that the Risk Management Sub Group (RMSG) had commissioned a piece of work by Zurich to assess the Council's overarching approach to conducting operational risk assessment, in line with its Risk Management Assurance framework. The work had produced a nine recommendation action plan which had been considered by the RMSG and timescales would be applied to each action. The Zurich report had been attached to the report as appendix 2.

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

- A Member noted that the re-valuation of the Council's assets had not been included on the register in relation to the risk that the financial impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the Council's Budget, she asked whether it would have implications for the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Deputy Chief Executive stated that it was understood that the impact of the revaluation would largely be felt in the current financial year, however, the potential for longer term impacts was being considered.

- The recommendations contained in the Zurich report did not have implementation dates assigned to them, was there an indication of when they would be actioned?

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the CRMG had considered whether to accept the Zurich report findings and had agreed to do so. It had asked the RMSG to consider and advise on appropriate implementation dates which could be provided to the Panel in due course.

- Was it likely that the Section 151 Officer would need to issue a Section 114 Notice in relation to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on the Council's finances?

The Deputy Chief Executive reassured the Panel that it was not anticipated that a Section 114 Notice would be issued, its reference in the report had been included to acknowledge the diligent oversight of the Council's finances.

RESOLVED – That the Panel scrutinised and commented on the current Corporate Risk Register (CS.19/21)

BTSP.31/21   IMPROVING ATTENDANCE POLICY

The Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the Task and Finish Group which was established to review the Council's Attendance Management Policy (CS.22/21). The Policy had been drafted and it was proposed that it be retitled the Improving Attendance Policy. The accompanying Manager's toolkit had also undergone a significant update it was also attached to the report.

The HR Advisor explained that a staff consultation on the policy had been carried out with a good level of response received. She summarised the feedback, noting that the following minor amendments would be incorporated into the policy:

- Uploading of sick notes would continue to done via the current practice of emailing HR, as opposed to uploading via iTrent as the policy had initially proposed. This was due to concerns relating to the storage capacity of iTrent;
- Absences related to Covid 19 would be managed via the Special Leave policy and would not be subject to the same triggers and action as a 7 day period of absence within twelve months, as the requirements relating to Covid were of a longer duration;
- Training on the new Policy would be delivered both through Skillsgate and group session either in person or virtually.

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

- The Chair expressed concern that iTrent would not be used as the reporting mechanism for absence.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Council were looking to move towards absence reporting being done via iTrent in the future and there was currently a procurement exercise being undertaken in relation to the use of self service modules in iTrent. Manager were used to the current system of absence reporting.

In terms of training, the Deputy Chief Executive was keen for the policy to be implemented and that appropriate training would be delivered to managers. In the event of iTrent being used to report absence additional training would be provided.

- How was information from Back to Work interviews collated and analysed for trends?

The HR Adviser explained that details of interview were submitted to the HR Advisory Service via email. Reports were generated on a regular basis to track reasons for absence so that trends may be identified and monitored. The interviews were an open conversation between the officer and their manager with additional support for employees being available if required.

In response to a further question from a Member regarding how any issues identified at a senior management level would be addressed, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that any such matters would be dealt with in line with the Policy.

- A Member commented that the toolkit was an important part of the policy and stressed to importance of it being implemented in a consistent manner across the Council.

A number of Members praised the work of the Task and Finish Group in its development of the policy and the quality of the document. It was proposed and seconded that a further meeting of the Task and Finish Group be convened to enable it to consider the feedback received from the staff consultation, following which the final report would be submitted directly to the Employment Panel for it to review and agree the policy. The proposal was seconded and the Panel indicated it agreement.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Panel considered and commented on the new Improving Attendance Policy and accompanying Manager's toolkit.

2) A further meeting of the Task and Finish Group would be convened so that it may consider the results of the staff consultation, following which a final report would be taken to Employment Panel for its review and agreement.

BTSP.32/21   CARLISLE PLAN 2021-2023

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted the draft Carlisle Plan 2021-2023 (PC.08/21).

The Policy and Performance Officer reported that the draft Carlisle Plan 2021-2023 brought together an ambitious programme for Carlisle under two priorities, namely Economic Growth and Health and Wellbeing. Those priorities would be supported by the programmes and projects outlined in appendix 1. Appendix 2 contained a summary of the draft plan along with a summary of the Council's Corporate Plan.

The Executive had considered the matter at their meeting on 8 March 2021 (EX.30/21 refers) and referred it to the Panel.

In considering the Carlisle Plan Members raised the following comments and questions:

- Paragraph 2.2. of the report stated "*… prosperity being the most important determinant of health and wellbeing.*" A Member sought further information for the rationale of that statement.

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that the statement sought to emphasise the link between quality homes, employment and standard of living had an impact on the health and wellbeing of a district. It was a symbolic statement which aimed to demonstrate the importance of prosperity as a factor in health and wellbeing.

- A Member expressed concern that the focus on economic growth may come at the cost of work to make the Council more sustainable and meeting its Climate Change targets. He suggested that the term sustainability be defined and reference to it be included in the Plan's vision, priorities and key programmes and projects.

A number of Members welcomed the Plan, however, they felt that the format in which it was presented was not conducive to using the Plan as either a marketing document for the district, nor did it set out clearly for the public or businesses the Council's plans. The following suggestions were made:

- The terminology used in the plan be amended so that it was accessible to a wider audience. The use of shorter, sharper language including "straplines";
- The Plan's objective be clearly set out;
- That the Plan should operate as the Council's pledge to the residents of the district;
- That the final version of the Plan would be able to be used as a marketing tool;
- The wording in relation to economic growth / business development and growth be strengthened;
- The Plan needed to include clearer reference to tourism as that would be an important factor in the economic growth of the district following the Covid 19 pandemic;
- The Plan should make reference to Carlisle being the capital of Cumbria as well as being a regional capital.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder thanked the Members for their comments. He was of the view that the Plan needed more visual and narrative content so that those reading it would be able to identify why a particular project or programme of work was being undertaken, what their outcomes and benefits would be. He assured the Panel that the priorities would be easily identifiable in the final version of the Plan.

The Deputy Chief Executive also thanked the Panel for its comments which would be taken on board as part of the ongoing development of the Plan.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Panel had considered and commented on the draft Carlisle Plan 2021-2023 (PC.08/21).

2) The Panel made a series of suggestions (outlined below) for the Executive to consider in the development of the final Plan document:

- The terminology used in the plan be amended so that it was accessible to a wider audience. The use of shorter, sharper language including "straplines";
- The Plan's objective be clearly set out;
- That the Plan should operate as the Council's pledge to the residents of the district;
- That the final version of the Plan would be able to be used as a marketing tool;
- The wording in relation to economic growth / business development and growth be strengthened;
- The Plan needed to include clearer reference to tourism as that would be an important factor in the economic growth of the district following the Covid 19 pandemic;
- The Plan should make reference to Carlisle being the capital of Cumbria as well as being a regional capital;
- That the term sustainability be defined and reference to it be included in the Plan's vision, priorities and key programmes and projects.

BTSP.33/21   SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted the draft Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel section for the Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21. Members' attention was drawn to the key items for Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel in 2021/22, the Panel were invited to suggest further areas to be included in the list.

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

- The Chair requested, pending the outcome of the Local Government Reorganisation consultation, that the matter be added to the Key Items for the Panel in the coming year.

- With reference to the penultimate paragraph of the Chair's report section, a Member felt that the description of the Task and Finish Group on long term absence be reworded to reflect the fact that the Group had covered a broader area of working encompassing improving attendance management.

The Chair undertook to reword that section.

- A Member noted that there were various sections of the report which referred to the remote working practices that had been adopted as a result of the Covid 19 restrictions. All meetings and decision making in the past civic year had taken place as scheduled which had required the acquisition on new skills and ways of working by both Officers and Members. The Member suggested that including a thank you in the report for all the work undertaken to allow the Council's committees to continue to operate.

The Chair thanked the Member for her suggestion and the Overview and Scrutiny Officer undertook to include such a reference in the report.

RESOLVED – 1) That the Panel had considered and commented on the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel section of the Scrutiny Annual Report (OS.10/21).

2) That the section on the Task and Finish Group into long term absence be reworded as set out above.

3) That and additional section be added to the report including thanks to the Officer and Members for their work in delivering the Council's meetings and decision making in virtual format.

BTSP.34/21   OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.07/21 providing an overview of matters relating to the work of the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel and the Panel's Work Programme. All items from the Outstanding Resolutions section of the report had been completed, in relation to the Task and Finish Group on Commercial Strategy, arrangements were being made for those Members who had expressed an interest in participating

RESOLVED – That the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Key Decision items relevant to the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel be noted (OS.07/21).

BTSP.35/21   CHAIR'S COMMENTS

The Chair thanked Officers in the Democratic Services team who had delivered the Council's virtual committee meetings, he felt the meetings had operated very well throughout the year. He further thanked the Members for their participation in the Panel's virtual meetings.

(The meeting ended at 6:00pm)