

Meeting Date: 16th July 2019

Public/Private*: Public

Title: **Business & Transformation Scrutiny Panel Chairman's Report –
Councillor James Bainbridge**

The first meeting of the Panel covered several issues:-

1. Change of Panel Meeting Times

The Panel agreed to trial afternoon meetings of B&T Scrutiny going forward. This is as a result of the Task and Finish work undertaken by the B.A.T.S in the previous Civic Year. The Panel will move to commence meetings at 4pm (with a briefing taking place at 3.30pm)

2. Outturn Reports for 2018/19

The Panel considered the Outturn Reports. Of note is the need for the Council to accrue over £400,000 in order to return to the MHCLG funds which were over provided to the Council for Business Rates being impacted after the 2015 floods. Due to the pooling of Business Rates this has now been deemed as an overpayment to ourselves. This prompted a considerable series of questions from the Panel and a discussion as to whether the extent of carry forwards should/could be agreed by the Panel. The Panel requested further information on carry forwards, which has been provided by the Corporate Director.

The various questions raised by the Panel within these Reports were professionally answered by the Finance Officers present and the Minutes outline the full breadth of these.

3. Sickness Absence Report 2018/19

The Report outlined a further increase in health-related absences on last year, which was itself an increase on the previous year, though it would be only fair to note that trend over the last decade has overall been a downwards one. With a new HR Manager in post following restructuring, the Panel were able to raise questions regarding the issues behind the data. Mental health issues formed a large number of absences across the Council (both in short term and long-term leave) and consequentially provided many of the questions. The Manager was able to honestly

discuss the issues and outline approaches that would be used to reduce this going forward. Likewise, Members had valid questions on how, as an Organisation, we can ensure that a Council employee operating from Bousteads Grassing has equal access to the range of courses and wellbeing provision that a Council employee working from the Civic Centre has. The need for the annual Wellbeing Survey being returned by a majority of Officers and Staff was underlined as providing an important evidence base for how the Council can tackle health related issues moving forwards.

Special Panel Meeting held on 6th June 2019

The Panel met to consider the Sands Centre Redevelopment Project. With many attendees, a complex Report and a series of changing costs, the subject rightly raised a large number of questions from Members.

Councillors will be able to take from the Minutes the full range of questions asked. Particular areas of interest focused on the use of Newman School; flood protection; the increasing scope of work to be done; the role of local businesses within the project and the monitoring of the project going forward should Council be minded to approve.

The Council will, over the course of the Medium-Term Financial Plan, have a number of significant obligations to further commit to, and assurance was sought that we could undertake these with relative financial ease.

The Panel made a number of recommendations to the Executive. It might help to outline briefly the rationale of some these. Firstly, as a Panel we would wish to be updated each quarter on the progress of the redevelopment with a series of KPI's to be agreed within our Work Programme, as well updates should there be any significant exceptions to the project. Naturally this is to establish and maintain the flow of information as the project develops. We also wished to have a written clarification of liabilities of the site should there be any flooding during construction. With regards to Newman School, we wished to better understand how the upgrading of a site there could be utilised after the Sands is completed. The overall view of the Panel was to support the project.

In addition, Wates have undertaken to hold another event aimed at bringing local businesses on board as contractors to this project. Members are often approached by local businesses wondering either who they can contact for involvement in building projects or vexed that a project has been undertaken using firms from outside of the area. If agreement is reached to proceed on 25th June, Wates are hopeful that the assurance of commencement will increase the level of interest from local contractors.

Full details of the discussions are to be found within the Minute Book

Cllr James Bainbridge
Chairman