



## **Business & Transformation Scrutiny Panel**

**Date:** Thursday, 24 February 2022

**Time:** 16:00

**Venue:** Flensburg Room

**Present:** Councillor Ruth Alcroft, Councillor Trevor Allison, Councillor James Bainbridge, Councillor Ms Jo Ellis-Williams, Councillor Mrs Linda Mitchell, Councillor Michael Mitchelson, Councillor Dr Les Tickner

*Councillor Mrs McKerrell was in attendance as a substitute Member to the vacant seat*

**Also Present:** Councillor J Mallinson, Leader  
Councillor G Ellis, Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder  
Councillor N Christian, Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder

**Officers:** Deputy Chief Executive  
Corporate Director of Governance and Regulatory Services  
Corporate Director of Finance and Resources  
Health and Wellbeing Manager  
Head of HR  
Head of Property Services  
Policy and Performance Officer

### **BTSP.13/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of the Town Clerk and Chief Executive.

### **BTSP.14/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were submitted.

### **BTSP.15/22 PUBLIC AND PRESS**

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

### **BTSP.16/22 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

### **BTSP.17/22 CALL-IN OF DECISIONS**

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

## **BTSP.18/22 TALKIN TARN MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

The Health and Wellbeing Manager presented an overview of the current management arrangements for Talk Tarn Country Park and sought the Panel's views on alternative and/or additional arrangements, that could be explored, to maximise the site's potential in delivering the Council's priorities. (CS.06/22)

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

- A Member asked for clarification with regard to the budget, the Health and Wellbeing Manager reported that the budget expectations had been lower than actually achieved resulting in money being available for investment into the site.
- Talkin Tarn was a considerable size, had there been any consideration given to the installation of a wind turbine on site?

The Health and Wellbeing Manager informed the Panel that there had previously been a small wind turbine on site which produced power locally for one building.

The Deputy Chief Executive highlighted the divisive nature of wind turbines in local communities. He reminded the Panel that decisions for matters such as this would be for the new authority to take.

- A lot of land at the site was given up to grazing, would this continue given the environmental climate emergency?

The Health and Wellbeing Manager responded that the Council had received funding from the Woodland Creation Planning Grant to change some of the land to woodland. Any further changes to land use would need some consideration.

A Member asked that a map of the site be circulated to Members.

The Council was very protective of the site, however, serious consideration should be given to how the site could be made more efficient in the future within the Council's climate change plans.

- The tearoom and kiosk were both very popular, however, there needed to be some work on the opening and closing hours of both. Often in the summer months there was nothing open for refreshments later on in the evening when the Tarn was still quite busy. It was suggested that the kiosk have more flexible opening hours later into the evening.

The Health and Wellbeing Manager responded that it had not been viable to extend the tearoom opening hours, as the number of customers were weather dependent, there had been occasions when the tearoom was staffed and there were no customers. He agreed to investigate the possibility of making the kiosk opening hours more flexible.

- There were some footpaths around the site which had become inaccessible to those with pushchairs or wheelchairs. This had caused people to walk around the issue damaging the surrounding grassed areas. It was suggested that some of the surplus budget could be used to improve some of the infrastructure around the Tarn.

The Health and Wellbeing Manager took on board the comments and agreed to discuss the matter with Cumbria County Council.

- A Member suggested that the Tarn could have an outdoor theatre, or glamping and asked if any land could be allocated to affordable housing.

The Panel discussed the possibility of establishing a Task and Finish Group and agreed that a workshop, held at Talk Tarn, would be most beneficial in drawing out ideas and suggestions for the future of site.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Talkin Tarn Management Arrangements report (CS.06/22) be received;

2) That the Health and Wellbeing Manager circulate a site map of Talk Tarn to Members.

3) That a workshop be set up to take place at Talkin Tarn.

3) That the following suggestions be taken into consideration as part of the workshop:

- Extend and vary the opening hours of the kiosk.
- That investment into the infrastructure of the Tarn be undertaken to improve footpaths

## **BTSP.19/22 SANDS CENTRE PROJECT MONITORING REPORT**

The Deputy Chief Executive presented an update on the current progress of the redevelopment of the Sands Centre site (CS.05/22).

The Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the measures undertaken to manage or adapt the existing proposals to deal with:

- a) Progress with the main contract works
- b) A requirement to update existing infrastructure in the events space to manage public safety systems to meet with current legislation.
- c) Working practices evolving from the management of the risks associated with the COVID - 19 pandemic
- d) Working practices evolving from the management of the Brexit Agreement arrangements

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that the 23 February 2022 saw an important milestone for the project and a small ceremony took place as the first tiles were placed in the pool.

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

-What was the plan for the Blessed Christopher Robinson site once the new facilities were open?

The Deputy Chief Executive reminded the Panel that the Blessed Christopher Robinson site was leased to GLL by the Diocese. Any future plans for the site either with GLL or potentially the College would be a matter for the Diocese.

- What was the timescales for the launch and the pricing structure? Did the Council have any input into the pricing structure to ensure the facilities were available to everyone?

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that there would be an initial soft opening to test the site before the official launch. Any pricing structures and concessions were prepared by GLL and the Council had no influence over them.

- How would the new facility be promoted?

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that discussions were taking place with GLL regarding promotion. The Health and Wellbeing Manager added that GLL would undertake a 'Festival of Sports' as part of their launch.

- Given the current economic circumstances did the Project Board envisage any additional borrowing requirements?

The Deputy Chief Executive reminded the Panel that the project included a six week 'float' to allow for any extension to the project. The project had a robust early warning system in place which alerted the team to any slippage and it was monitored closely. He did not envisage any additional borrowing requirements.

- A Member raised the issue of the lighting and roof and asked if the work should be undertaken now as part of the redevelopment.

The Deputy Chief Executive clarified what work was required for the roof and explained that it was not necessary at this stage, however, it would remain a risk but not to this project. There would be work undertaken as Phase 2 by the Council in its role as landlord.

- A Member asked for an update on the life safety systems and the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the work was progressing. It was vital for the Council to meet its obligation as a landlord to a public building and the work was in the scope of the budget.

RESOLVED - That the Sands Centre Project Monitoring Report (CS.05/22) be received.

### **BTSP.20/22 SICKNESS ABSENCE QUARTER 3 2021/22**

The HR Manager presented the authority's sickness absence levels for the period 1 April to 31 December 2021 and outlined other sickness absence information. (CS.07/22)

The HR Manager reported that the number of days lost per full time equivalent employee equated to 8.9 in the first three quarters of 2021/22 compared to 6.2 for the same period in 2020/21. This uptrend had been seen across many authorities. The report set out the trend for both long term and short term absences, the sickness absence reasons and the work being undertaken to support employees and managers.

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

- Were there plans in place to concentrate on having all Return to Work Interviews carried out within five days now that staff were returning to the building?

The HR Manager responded that the Return to Work Interviews were being carried out regardless of where the employee was working and there would continue to be a focus on undertaking them in a timely manner as it was an important part of the whole process.

- The sickness absence figures showed one Directorate that had a disproportionately high absence rate. A Member commented that the management of the team needed to be addressed.

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that Directorate in question had a significant number of long term sickness in an area that had physical jobs in a variety of roles. It was evident that not all absences were work related; there were significant challenges outside of work for staff in the lower paid roles. Managers and staff were positively supported in managing long term absence. There had been changes in the way that absences were managed and managers were more direct about absences especially in instances that were within the Council's control.

- The Panel asked that future reports included the number of employees in each Directorate for comparison.

- What was in place for the Council to support individuals who were absent due to non work related stress / mental health?

The HR Manager detailed the support and signposting that was in place to support individuals. The new Attendance Management Policy was in place to enable all managers to access the information to support their staff.

- Was there any way to measure how effective the wellbeing programme had been?

The Deputy Chief Executive responded that there was information available on the number of people who had accessed the programme, however, it was difficult to gauge the actual outcome and interventions. He agreed to include more detailed information in the next report.

- A Member suggested consideration be given to the introduction of 'personal days' to support those who needed time to deal with stress or mental health issues.

- The Panel asked that the next report focused on mental health along with the monitoring information.

- A Member highlighted the impact interpersonal relationships within the workplace could have on mental health.

The Deputy Chief Executive agreed and outlined the support available to managers to deal with interpersonal issues within teams.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Sickness Absence Report Quarter 3 2021/21 be received;

2) That the Quarter 4 report should focus on mental health, alongside the monitoring information, and should also included:

- the number of employees in each directorate

- details and outcomes from the wellbeing programme

## **BTSP.21/22 REVENUE BUDGET OVERVIEW AND MONITORING REPORT APRIL TO DECEMBER 2021**

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources presented an overview of the Council's General Fund revenue budgetary position for the period April to December 2021 which was considered by the Executive on 21 February 2022. (RD.70/21)

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

- Who would pay for the Shadow Authority elections on 5 May 2022 and who would pay for any Parish Council by elections prior to vesting day?

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources responded that the Implementation Reserve would be used to pay for the Shadow Authority elections. She agreed to provide a written response with regard to Parish Council by elections.

- Why had the Council not spent all of the Government Covid grants that had to be paid back?

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources explained that some of the grant were paid up front and were based on the number of people eligible. The Council was very proactive in awarding grants, however, not all those eligible took the grants.

- A Member asked for clarification with regard to the figures in the report referring to the Lanes and asked if the cost of the Lanes exceeded the income would the Council have to pay some of the costs?

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources clarified the figures and agreed to provide the Panel with a written response regarding costs.

- Referring to the virements processed a Member asked for clarity on the following:

- a) Garage Services underspend and shortfall (recharges)
- b) Development Control underspend in employee related costs, increase in fees, could this be redirected to support enforcement work?
- c) Underspend on premises expenditure
- d) Other Financial Costs

In response the Corporate Director of Finance clarified the following:

- a) The underspend in the Garage Services would show as a small saving in other Directorate budgets
- b) The increase in Development Control fees had been the result of some significant applications. The Corporate Director of Economic Development could reinvest the monies into the service on a non recurring basis.
- c) The underspend on premises expenditure had been the result of not being able to access buildings during Covid. She agreed to provide further details in writing.
- d) The target for salary turnover remained ahead of target due to vacancies. The savings were taken and the corporate savings target would be funded from savings achieved elsewhere in the revenue budget.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Revenue Budget Overview and Monitoring Report: April to December (RD.70/21) be noted;

2) That the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources provide the following written responses:

- who would pay for Parish Council by elections?
- would the Council have to pay costs for the Lanes if they exceeded the income?
- further information on the premises expenditure underspend

## **BTSP.22/22 CAPITAL BUDGET OVERVIEW AND MONITORING REPORT APRIL TO DECEMBER 2021**

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources presented an overview of the budgetary position of the Council's capital programme for the period April to December 2021 which was

considered by the Executive on 21 February 2022.

A Member asked how any further increase in the interest rate impacted planned borrowing, the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources outlined the monitoring process that was in place, drawing attention to the impact of longer term borrowing on the new Authority.

RESOLVED - That the Capital Budget Overview and Monitoring Report: April to December 2021 be received.

### **BTSP.23/22 QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22**

The Policy and Performance Officer submitted the Quarter 3 2021/22 performance against the current Service Standards and an update on the delivery of the Carlisle Plan 2021-23 actions as defined in the Plan. Performance against the Panel's 2021/22 Key performance Indicators (KPIs) were also included (PC.02/22).

The Policy and Performance Officer drew the Panel's attention to the summary of exceptions and the reasons for those exceptions.

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

- Was SS08: proportion of official local authority searches completed on time subject to seasonal variation?

The Policy and Performance Officer agreed to provide a written response.

- Would the development of the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Cumbria change due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)?

The Deputy Chief Executive explained that dialogue was ongoing. At this stage in the LGR process it was not prudent to begin work on disentangling the contract. There was too much risk in changing the contract immediately but it would be considered in the future by the new authority.

- There was some concern that the increase to the cost of living would create an increase in the number of people applying for benefits. How would the Council deal with a potential increase?

The Corporate Director of Finance and Resources responded that the work load of the team was constantly monitored and additional resources could be diverted to the team from the test and trace team if required.

The Finance, Governance and Resources Portfolio Holder added that the housing benefit claimants were legacy claimants and any new claims would be made through Universal Credit which would not come to the City Council.

RESOLVED - 1) That the Quarter 3 Performance Report 2021/22 (PC.02/22) be noted;

2) That the Policy and Performance Officer provide the Panel with regard to a potential seasonal variation to Service Standard SS08.

## **BTSP.24/22 OVERVIEW REPORT**

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer submitted report OS.06/22 which provided an overview of matters related to the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel.

Referring to the resolutions from previous meetings, the Corporate Director of Finance and Resources reported that BTSP.07/22 (2) had been completed and circulated to Members on 17 January 2022.

RESOLVED - That the Overview Report incorporating the Key Decision items relevant to the Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel be noted (OS.06/22).

## **BTSP.25/22 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.26/22 ASSET MANAGEMENT OF KINGSTOWN INDUSTRIAL ESTATE & PARKHOUSE BUSINESS PARK - UPDATE ON PROGRESS**

(Public and Press excluded by virtue of paragraph 3)

The Head of Property Services provided an update on progress with the implementation of the business plan for Kingstown Industrial estate and Parkhouse Business Park (GD.10/22)

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

- How did the ground rents compare to other industrial estates across the County?

The Head of Property Services explained that Carlisle was a unique market and it was difficult to compare with sites in nearby areas as Carlisle was the primary market. Other industrial estates used Carlisle as their comparable baseline.

- Did new rent contracts allow for periodic reviews?

The Head of Property Services confirmed that all new leases included a five year review pattern.

- Was it possible to segregate the charges for undertaking the rent reviews?

The Head of Property Services detailed the costings and budget for Chancerygate and explained that the rent reviews were part of the overall work and could not be identified separately.

- Did the Council have in house capability to maintain the work or would Chancerygate be retained?

The Head of Property Services clarified that, although the Council had an excellent team, they



did not have the expertise or capacity to undertake this work. The Chancerygate contract allowed for a renewal after five years, with an option of a further five years and a maximum of fifteen years. Discussions were currently ongoing with Chancerygate.

In addition the Panel also discussed ongoing planning permission; proposals for existing and new sites and outcomes of some of the rent review. The Panel received an update on the Gateway 44 site and the development of other sites across the City.

RESOLVED - That the Asset Management of Kingstown Industrial Estate and Parkhouse Business Park Update (GD.10/22) be received.

The Meeting ended at: 18:27