



Report to

Council

Meeting Date: 9th November 2021

Public/Private*: Public

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

Meeting date 26th August 2021

Members will recall that at this meeting we handled a call-in request regarding the tendering of the contract for the Old Fire Station (OFS). Due to the issue relating to tendering it fell to the BaTS Panel to assess rather than the Health & Wellbeing, which would normally have dealt with areas of operation relating to the OFS. It was also a Part B agenda item, and as such the standard rules relating to this area apply. Members had a series of questions relating to the issue, with Officers and the Executive Member for Finance, Governance and Resources responding. There are three options open for a call-in to conclude. A call-in can be referred to full Council, referred to the Executive again or not referred onwards in which case the decision becomes live following the meeting. After a vote, this latter option was the outcome. The tender has now been signed by all parties. This has moved the operation of the Old Fire Station to Greystone Development Ltd, with the City Council retaining the freehold.

Following this we considered the Draft Medium Financial Plan, Capital Investment Strategy and Asset Management from 2022/23 to 2026/27. An ambitious timescale considering under the intended Local Government Reform we will cease to exist in May 2023, however it has always been the policy of the Council to consider these plans annually on a projected four-year basis. Under the circumstances the questions of the Panel concentrated more to the immediate future, rather than on the projections at the back end of the timescale

After noting the Audit reference, we moved onto the Sickness Absence Report. The new HR Manager outlined the actions being taken. Whilst the previous year had shown a marked, and perhaps surprising improvement in sickness and absence, the figures in the first quarter has shown a slippage backwards, which was a concern. It is difficult to extrapolate firm conclusions from one quarter, particularly as standard working practices have been so changed in the last 18 months.

Meeting date 7th October 2021

Considering the first quarter Revenue and Capital Reports, Members had several questions. There is a Revenue underspend so far, but as Members will be aware, a variance at this stage does not always result in a similar position once the future three quarters are considered. The Corporate Director has not commissioned any projected borrowing now but is keeping the situation under review and will act if it appears that interest rates will be increased. Similarly increasing energy costs (or energy inflation) will expose the Council to some additional and unbudgeted costs, which the virement system will be used to counter. The Skew Bridge project has now completed since the meeting took place.

It was decided to not carry on with the Commercialisation Task & Finish Group as a consequence of Local Government Reform limiting the options that the Group could consider and the feeling that in light of this Member and Officer time might be allocated elsewhere on identifiable issues. Thank you to the Members who offered to join this Group, to Cllr Patrick who was chairing the Group and to the Members who gave up their time for training. Personally, I found the training very valuable and hope others did as well.

We moved to the Sands Centre and Civic Centre Reports. When you consider the issues that have been and are presently occurring in the international supply chain the progress on both these schemes has been positive. They are within tolerable budgetary levels, working relationships between clients and constructors are positive and work is progressing, at present there is a one-week delay to the Sands Centre, which is reasonably positive all things considered.

I always knew that one day something would come to the Panel which I would personally struggle with, and so this was the case with Squad Working, a new approach to team working and project management, though in reality as a Council, projects like the Sands and Civic Centre already have a strong bias towards Squad Working. The Report set out to formalise this approach within a 50-page policy. In essence, the Panel split between those who understood the general approach and had little to no reservations in advancing it, to those who felt more knowledge on the subject would be required before they would be entirely content in endorsing it. We will therefore be receiving a further update.

Nationally across Councils and Public Sector bodies, there is considerable debate about the future role of the workplace, working from home and adaptations to working practices. Covid-19 has probably as an event pushed this scenario further up the workplace agenda than it would have otherwise appeared. We received from Officers the results of a staff survey on this issue, which will be used to establish a way forward.

Lastly, we considered a Part B agenda item on the ongoing ICT Services. Members had received an update three months ago and wished for this to be presented quarterly such was our view on the importance of this issue. This still is the case, and whilst Part B rules

apply, I hope that Members will take the time to update themselves on this issue from Group Members who were present, or Officers involved. We will continue to monitor this on a three-month basis.

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

Cllr James Bainbridge
Chairman