

# Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel

Agenda  
Item:

**A.6**

Meeting Date: 01 April 2021

Portfolio: Cross-cutting

Key Decision: No

Within Policy and  
Budget Framework

Private/Public Public

Title: Scrutiny Annual Report

Report of: Overview and Scrutiny Officer

Report Number: OS.10/21

## Purpose / Summary:

This report provides the draft Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel Section for the Scrutiny Annual Report 2020/21.

## Recommendations:

Members are asked to:

- Consider and comment on the attached section of the draft report.

## Tracking

Executive:	<b>Not applicable</b>
Scrutiny:	<b>BTSP 01/04/21</b>
Council:	<b>27/04/21</b>

## 1. Background

1.1 The Constitution: Article 6 – Overview and Scrutiny Committees, 6.03 Specific functions [c] states that:

***‘Annual report.** Overview and scrutiny committees must report annually to full Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate’.*

1.2 This report contains this Panel’s draft sections for the Annual Scrutiny Report 2020/21. Each Scrutiny Panel will consider their own sections of the draft report before recommending its acceptance to Council.

## 2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Panel consider and comment on the appended draft report.

Contact Officer:            Rowan Jones                            Email:   rowan.jones@carlisle.gov.uk

Appendices  
attached to report:                            Draft general and Business and Transformation  
Scrutiny Panel sections for the Scrutiny Annual Report  
2020/21

**Note:** in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- None

### **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS:**

**LEGAL -**

**FINANCE –**

**EQUALITY –** This report raises no explicit issues relating to the public sector Equality Duty.

**INFORMATION GOVERNANCE –**

## **APPENDIX: Draft general and Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel sections for the Scrutiny Annual Report 2020-21**

### Introduction

The Annual Report for the Civic Year 2020-21 will reflect on a year of significant change for Scrutiny Panels at Carlisle City Council. The changes for Scrutiny reflect how the City Council as a whole has adapted to remote working and virtual meetings in response to the unprecedented challenges of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Carlisle City Council has three scrutiny panels:

- Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel
- Economic Growth Scrutiny Panel
- Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Panel

Over the course of the year each Panel has run a full and varied workplan, reflecting aspects of the City Council's function that fall within that Panel's remit. Members have looked carefully at their work programmes, working with council officers to ensure that their scrutiny activity is targeted at the most important issues and decisions that are facing the City Council as Carlisle looks to recover and move forward from the Covid-19 pandemic.

### What is Scrutiny and why is it important?

Scrutiny is a process to ensure that decisions taken by the Council reflect the needs and priorities of communities in Carlisle. Scrutiny is carried out by Councillors who understand and promote the concerns of the people who elected them, connecting decision makers to local communities.

Council decisions can be made by Council Officers, by the Council's 'Executive' (the political leadership) and by full Council (all Councillors).

Scrutiny Panels are made up of Non-Executive Councillors who work together, across political parties, to understand why decisions are made and how the Council is performing to deliver the best possible outcomes for Carlisle and its people. Scrutiny Panels do not have decision-making powers; their role is to challenge and make recommendations that influence decision makers.

## Scrutiny Response to Covid-19

During 2020/21 all Panel meetings have taken place in a virtual setting, following guidelines set out in the Coronavirus Act 2020.

Carlisle City Council was quick to respond to the need to deliver virtual committee meetings and we would like to note our achievement in having delivered all planned scrutiny meetings during 2020/21. Panel Members and Officers have worked together to develop a new way of working, adapting and persevering with new IT skills, supporting each other and showing tolerance and humour at the bumps in the road that have sometimes accompanied the shift to virtual meetings.

Maintaining scrutiny activity during the pandemic has been important because:

- Significant decisions with impacts on Carlisle have been made during this time.
- Councillors represent their local communities and their knowledge and perspective are vital to ensuring a robust, democratic response to the crisis and recovery plans that are suitable for local needs.

Scrutiny Chairs have worked closely together to co-ordinate their Panel's activities to ensure a good level of oversight across the City Council's role in Covid-19 response and recovery.

### Comment from Leader of the Council, Councillor John Mallinson

*<Text to be inserted>*

### Corporate Peer Challenges, January and November 2020 – implications for Scrutiny

The Carlisle Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken in January 2020 was positive and highlighted a number of strengths for the Council. This Peer Challenge focussed on leadership, governance, corporate capacity and financial resilience. This Peer Challenge included some comments around the role of scrutiny. Scrutiny Panels, led by their Chairs, have made some steps in beginning to respond to these comments. For example, in recognising that developing robust workplans can help Scrutiny to focus on key strategic issues for Carlisle and making recommendations that will add value to the decision making process.

A further Corporate Peer Challenge, undertaken remotely in November 2020, reviewed the Council's use of existing governance arrangements. There are likely to be further implications of this Peer Challenge for scrutiny panels that can be considered over the coming scrutiny year.

## Public engagement in Scrutiny

Scrutiny Panels are open to the public to attend at the Civic Centre, when Panels are meeting at a physical location. Panel meetings can be viewed online via the Council's website, whilst virtual meetings are taking place as part of Covid-19 social distancing measures.

Agendas, report and minutes from Scrutiny Panel meetings are available on the City Council website. Members of the public can also submit questions for meetings; these need to be submitted 11 full days before the Panel Meeting.

For more information on these meetings or on how to engage with the Scrutiny process, please contact: [scrutiny@carlisle.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@carlisle.gov.uk).

## **Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel (BTSP)**

### Chair's Report, Councillor James Bainbridge

At the time I wrote my last annual report, if you had said that over the coming year the Council would see an extensive level of direct and sustained financial support from Government, which would enable both the Council and the wider local economy to exist as solvent entities through a global pandemic, I would have thought it far-fetched. However, in terms of the remit of this panel, 2020 has been one of the most varied and unpredictable years in local government finance.

The financial performance of the Council at this time, has been very much on the radar of BTSP. In addition to the regular quarterly reports, the panel has reviewed the impact of Covid on our financial position. This we will continue to monitor in the coming months through further reports and study of budget outturns.

The present work of the Council on the major capital projects at the Sands Centre and on the ground floor of the Civic Centre both came before the panel for review. There has been a reassuring degree of oversight by Officers in the projects, which at this point are both on schedule and within agreed budgets.

With the conclusion of the Junction 44 drawing near, we have taken the opportunity to review this project and consider it within the context of wider commercialisation work that Carlisle City Council has undertaken and wishes to undertake in the future. Some Councillors, myself included, had expressed some concern when the project was

commenced. It is fair to say that the work of BTSP has assisted in offering members a reassurance that such projects can enhance the City as a whole, as well as providing a secure level of income to the Council to fund service provision.

On the horizon there is the final report due from the Corporate Peer Review. The previous initial report firmly highlighted the need for enhancements in the present scrutiny arrangements. In the likely two years that we have ahead of us as an authority, this will be an issue that will require our further attention.

We held an extremely positive and productive Task and Finish Group on long term absence and, as a Panel, are extremely proud of the work undertaken in this area and the potential improvements this could bring the Council on many levels. Thank you to the Members and staff of the Council who gave additional time to take this project forward. Our next area of Task and Finish work will relate to the commercialisation strategies and policies of the Council.

I wanted to take a brief moment in this report to thank Rowan, Jacqui and Rachel for their work in establishing and managing the online meetings. I am sure that Members will be aware that several Councils in the UK took the position that Covid restrictions on meetings would result in their own Scrutiny Panels being put on hold, in a few cases they still are in abeyance a year later. In Carlisle, we missed the last cycle of meetings in the previous civic year, but virtual meetings commenced in May 2020 at the start of this Civic Year. We were amongst the first Councils (if not the first) to establish online Scrutiny meetings. The meetings have been professionally delivered by the Council, and I am sure that we are appreciative for the efforts made to keep Member involvement in the scrutiny of policies and projects active at this time.

#### Comment from Councillor Gareth Ellis, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Resources

*<Text to be inserted>*

#### Key items for Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel in 2021-22

The following items are topics that Business and Transformation Scrutiny Panel have identified will be key their workplan for 2021/22:

- Commercialisation Strategy T&F Group
- Covid-19 impacts and challenges to business recovery