

MINUTE
of
CABINET

Minute of hybrid meeting held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Eastwood Park, Giffnock at 9.00am on 16 June 2022.

Present:

Councillor Owen O'Donnell (Leader)
Councillor Andrew Anderson (*)

Councillor Katie Pragnell

(*) indicates remote attendance

Councillor O'Donnell, Leader, in the Chair

Attending:

Lorraine McMillan, Chief Executive; Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations and Partnerships; Mark Ratter, Director of Education; Andy Cahill, Director of Environment; Sharon Dick, Head of HR, Corporate Services and Community Services; Murray Husband, Head of Digital and Community Safety; Lesley Bairden, Head of Finance & Resources (CFO), HSCP; Jamie Reid, Strategic Insight and Communities Senior Manager; Graeme Smith, Communications Manager; Lesley Anne Neill, Programme Management Office (PMO) Manager; Morag Brown, Strategic Services Senior Lead; Barbara Clark, Chief Accountant; Robert Spencer, Principal Accountant; Sharon McIntyre, Committee Services Officer and Liona Allison, Assistant Committee Services Officer.

Apology:

Councillor Danny Devlin.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

20. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME - UPDATE

21. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships providing an update on the achievements of the Digital Transformation Programme during 2021/22 and an overview of Programme plans for 2022/23.

The Director of Business Operations and Partnerships provided background to the report advising that this was the Council's third major programme of transformation and change and was based on the Digital Transformation Strategy 2021-24.

It was advised that over recent years the corporate change capacity had focused on the procurement and implementation of business ICT systems replacing ageing legacy systems across the Council with several of these replacement projects implemented during the challenging background of the pandemic.

The Director of Business Operations and Partnerships advised that the report provided an update on the Digital Transformation Strategy 2021-24 covering the three priority areas of customer experience; business systems and processes; and workforce productivity, particularly through Microsoft 365.

She outlined that the area of customer experience aimed to provide a consistent, efficient customer experience, designed with the user and to make best use of the Scottish Approach to Service Design.

Business systems and processes aimed to optimise new systems to drive out the business benefits and ensure efficient end to end processes, whilst the aim of Workforce Productivity was to increase the productivity and effectiveness of the workforce, enabled by Office 365 capabilities and better use of data. She advised that there were detailed programmes of work in each of these areas which would keep systems in contract, manage upgrades and meet new requirements.

It was outlined that the projects relied on shared resources for example, IT, HR, accountancy and legal, and that there were pressures of business as usual versus projects, which would require to be carefully managed. Project prioritisation was continually reviewed with cross cutting governance boards in place and quarterly review by the Corporate Management Team.

A key focus was to establish quantifiable benefits which would allow for project prioritisation based on budget savings and service improvements for customers; for example through the Council's Modern, Ambitious Programme (MAP) close to £11.8m of the 2018-21 agreed savings arose from efficiencies or as a result of a focus on the Council's 5 capabilities.

Thereafter the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships outlined the progress updates for each of the three priority areas as well as looking forward.

Key projects in the customer experience area were noted as a move from analogue to digital telecare, unified communications, online processes and functionality of portals with real time updates.

Under business systems and processes two key projects for the Health and Social Care Partnership were noted as replacement of the case management system and care at home scheduling system. Other key areas of work included moving to a fully cloud hosted income management system to improve functionality in taking payments from customers and launching the new housing system.

For workforce productivity the focus in 2022-23 would be to drive further business benefits from use of Office 365, replacement of the performance management system and the creation of an information governance delivery group.

In response to a question from Councillor Pragnell on the timescale for the completion of the Programme, the Director advised that the programme would be ongoing for the Council as it continued to progress efficiencies through new technologies to ensure that opportunities were realised through digital, providing improvements and benefits to the Council and users alike.

Councillor Anderson raised the issue of online security in Council processes and sought further information on the Parent Portal. He requested that updates on security were included in future reports.

The Director of Business Operations and Partnerships confirmed that cyber and information security was at the forefront of Council processes with data impact privacy assessments carried out alongside rigorous financial control and compliance to protect the Council and its customers from fraud. She also advised that the Parent Portal would be rolled out shortly and that Parent Pay was only available at present.

The Head of Digital and Community Safety advised that he was responsible for information and cyber security and that the Council had public sector network (PSN) accreditation. This was reviewed annually and was more rigorous than ISO 27001. He noted that the Council required to maintain this accreditation to access central government systems. For payment systems, he explained that the Council had and maintained Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) accreditation. In terms of best practice there is an Information Security Officer who undertakes operational security such as following the public sector action plan produced following the WannaCry cyber-attack on the NHS and links into the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and other bodies regarding intelligence and response. He advised that the Council was aware of the constant threat to online security.

Councillor Anderson have noted the facilities that the NCSC could provide to public sector organisations, the Head of Digital and Community Safety advised that the Council received live updates from the NCSC with regard to phishing and ransomware in public bodies, which the Council assessed and responded to as required. He further advised that he would confirm the service provided to the Council by the NCSC to Councillor Anderson. Councillor Anderson sought confirmation on the analogue to digital programme, the Head of Digital and Community Safety outlined a range of analogue services within the Council scheduled to be addressed.

In addition, the Chief Executive explained that at a national level advised that there was a Digital Office for Local Government funded by the 32 local authorities with a Chief Information Security Officer appointed in a national role to ensure a fast response for local authorities to any online security threat. This role also ensured best practise, worked on collective projects and provided guidance. She recognised that local government would always be a target for cyber-crime. However the Council did everything it could to make sure its systems were as robust as possible.

The Cabinet noted the achievements and future plans across the 3 areas of the Digital Transformation Programme: Customer Experience; Business Systems and Processes and Workforce Productivity.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BENCHMARKING FRAMEWORK – 2020-21 PERFORMANCE

22. The Cabinet considered a report by the Chief Executive, which provided an update on the national Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) and an overview of the Council's performance against the national Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) indicators for the period of 2020/21. It was noted that the report provided the position at the start of the pandemic.

The Chief Executive introduced the report by providing a background on the LGBF. She advised that the framework was approximately ten years old and prior to this local government had reported to Audit Scotland annually on statutory performance indicators. It had been agreed that if local government developed and monitored a new series of benchmarking indicators, Audit Scotland would focus on these. The Improvement Service had taken this work forward.

The Chief Executive explained that she sat on the Board of the Improvement Service and also had previously sat on the advisory Board for the LBGF to develop the indicators. She advised that originally the focus of the indicators was cost and efficiency related, although they now covered outcome, customer and people indicators.

Referring to the national report, the Chief Executive emphasised it was not a league table providing examples from education and recycling where the Council's strategic aim was to be in the top position for outcomes but for cost indicators aimed to be in the middle to reflect investment and efficiency. She noted the impact of other factors such as levels of deprivation and whether a local authority was urban or rural, and how it was helpful to compare the Council against other local authorities that were similar in make-up when interpreting the statistics. She advised that if an indicator was not performing as expected a review was undertaken to establish if there were performance or data issues. For example, with support costs, the Council found that some costs were being included when they shouldn't have been therefore this was a data issue. Another indicator for culture and leisure was being investigated.

She noted that even with tight budgets, the National report had shown that performance had remained strong across councils although the impact of reduced budgets was beginning to be shown. Following on from the pandemic an exercise would be needed to reset the benchmarks.

The Director of Business Operations and Partnerships then commented on the report advising that it was for the period of 2020/21. Therefore there was a data time lag with COVID-19 impact on the data. She advised that the report provided a summary of performance with further information included within the Annex. It was noted that four new indicators had been included in the 2020/21 data set. These were noted as the percentage of children living in poverty (after housing costs); Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita; claimant count as percentage of working age population; and claimant count as percentage of 16-24 Population. She provided an overview of indicators where the Council was high performing comparatively which included educational attainment, school exclusion rates, child protection re-registration, household recycling, the percentage of Class A roads that should be considered for maintenance, environmental health costs, investment in economic development, minimising delayed discharge from hospitals and residential costs per week for residents aged 65 and over.

It was advised that where costs were over the national average, for example roads maintenance, the Council was investing in services to improve these for residents. Investigations would also be carried out into indicators where the Council was not performing as well comparatively.

Councillor Pragnell enquired what was defined as a positive destination for school leavers, in response to which the Director of Education advised that this was defined as moving onto higher education, further education, employment, training or voluntary work. He advised that the initial leavers' survey carried out by Skills Development Scotland (SDS) at the end of September for that year provided a snapshot although the participation measure was also used for young people over the entire year and gave a better indication of the overall position. The Director of Education advised that he would be happy to discuss further with Councillor Pragnell.

Councillor Anderson referred to unsubstantiated suggestions that dropout rates of East Renfrewshire university students were high in response to which the Director of Education confirmed that the SDS survey carried out in March each year showed that East Renfrewshire school leavers were still in a positive destination at this time.

Councillor O'Donnell welcomed the depth, detail and scrutiny in the report and was also encouraged by the responses received on individual metrics. He further welcomed the high level of educational attainment and full responses from Officers on each of the indicators when queries had arisen.

Responding to a question from Councillor O'Donnell on timescales for the 2022 data, the Director of Business Operations and Partnerships advised that the indicators were reviewed internally throughout the year including financial indicators which were measured through the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). The Strategic Services Senior Lead advised that the next data set would not be available until early next year however fourteen of the LGBF indicators were included in the Council's performance management indicators.

Having welcomed the findings outlined in the report, the Cabinet noted the Council's performance against the LGBF indicators and the intended action being taken by departments to address any performance issues. The Cabinet decided there were no aspects of the Council's performance in need of improvement or further investigation at this time.

ALLOCATIONS POLICY EMERGENCY CHANGES

23. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, advising of emergency changes required to East Renfrewshire Council's Allocations Policy.

The report explained that the existing Lettings Policy was approved by the Cabinet in June 2018 in preparation for the launch of the Choice Based Lettings service in February 2019. The policy included a lettings target to determine what percentage of empty homes should be allocated to each priority group.

The policy required to be reviewed regularly but due to additional demand placed on the Housing Service as a result of COVID 19 this had not been progressed as quickly as had been hoped. However, a full review was currently underway and a report would be submitted to Cabinet later in 2022 following a consultation process.

The report explained that in March 2020 national lockdown restrictions put in place by the Scottish Government due to the COVID 19 pandemic resulted in significant disruption to all services provided by the Council. For the allocation of council homes in particular this meant homeless households were unable to move on from their temporary accommodation into their new permanent homes from March 2020 until July 2020, and during this time repair work for empty homes was only permitted for emergency homeless accommodation. In addition, social distancing rules reduced the productivity of the workforce once repair work was permitted. This had resulted in a considerable backlog of homeless applicants waiting for housing.

The Director advised that in order to address the backlog, using delegated emergency powers, the percentage of lets to homeless households was increased during 2020/21. However high demand from homeless applicants continued and in order to address and ease the backlog, in April 2022 Councillors Tony Buchanan and Danny Devlin had been consulted on and supported proposals for a six month change to the Lettings Policy. This increased the percentage of new build council homes allocated to homeless households from the existing target of 25% to up to 40% and increased the percentage of existing council homes allocated to homeless households from the existing target of 55% to up to 70%. The changes would be in effect from 5 April until 5 October 2022.

Councillor Pragnell asked why there has been such an increase in demand for housing generally. In reply the Director explained that officers were investigating the reasons for the increases but suggested that the quality of the new council housing becoming available and the establishment of the choice based letting policy was having an impact.

Councillor O'Donnell having welcomed the full review being undertaken, the Cabinet noted:-

- (a) the current demand for Council housing in East Renfrewshire Council, in particular the increase in homelessness;
- (b) the emergency decision to increase the percentage of lets to homeless households from April 2022 until October 2022; and
- (c) the proposal to report back to the Cabinet later in 2022 with a comprehensive review of the Council's Allocation Policy.

PLACE BASED INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2021-22

24. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, to provide an update on the progress being made with the Placed Based Investment Programme (PBIP) and advise members on the decision to fund two replacement projects from the 2021/22 grant allocation.

The Director of Environment provided the background to the increased project costs for the Dunterlie Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) project, with potential contract costs of £450,200 compared with the original estimate of £250,000, with only one tender received. This would have required the Council to fund the additional £200,000 from its own resources. In view of this the Director of Environment decided not to proceed with the project. Enquiries were made of the Scottish Government about alternative uses for the funding and it was established that no new activity could be funded from this round of grant funding for 2021/22. However, any uncommitted funds could be allocated to existing Placed Based Investment Programme projects provided the contracts could be let by 31 March 2022. The Neilston Shop Front Improvement Scheme and Young Enterprise Scotland (YES) premises at Rouken Glen Park Training Centre projects were identified as projects within the existing scheme that could be expanded. He explained that Councillors Tony Buchanan and Caroline Bamforth had been consulted on and supported the change under emergency powers.

Councillors Anderson and O'Donnell thanked the Director of Environment for securing the funding and enhancing these two projects and welcomed the proposal of visiting the Young Enterprise Scotland (YES) premises at Rouken Glen Park Training Centre in due course.

The Cabinet noted the:

- (a) progress made to date on the implementation of the programme to date; and
- (b) decision to approve the substitution of the Dunterlie Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) project with the projects from Young Enterprise Scotland and the Neilston Shop Front Improvement Scheme as outlined in the report.

REGENERATION CPUTAL GRANT FUND 2020-21 – COWAN PARK ENTERPRISE AND COMMUNITY HUB

25. The Cabinet considered a report by the Director of Environment, to inform the Cabinet on the progress of the Cowan Park Enterprise and Community Hub which is funded through the Scottish Government's Regeneration and Capital Grant Fund (RCGF) and Council resources, and subsequent increased costs in relation to project delivery.

The Director of Environment advised that due to external factors outwith the Council's control there had been an increase in contract costs of £228,700. This was due to a combination of factors experienced since the start of the project including a collapsed main sewer requiring rerouting and renewal to main road connection, increases due to COVID such as manpower and material shortages and delays, and increases due to necessary scope enhancements such as end user adjustments to expand toilets and increase disabled car parking.

It was explained that the Economic Development team had been able to secure a further £200,000 in grant funding from the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund programme to offset this additional cost. The shortfall of £28,700 would be met from existing budgets from within the Environment Department's section of the Council's General Fund Capital for 2022/23 through the use of unallocated provisional sums. He outlined that Councillors Tony Buchanan and Caroline Bamforth had been consulted on and supported the change under emergency powers.

Councillor Pragnell thanked the team for progressing this project given the circumstances and enquired as to the opening date for the project. The Director of Environment advised that he would confirm this date and notify Elected Members.

Councillor Anderson thanked the team and enquired as to whether drop in facilities that would provide young people with a safe learning environment and internet facilities would be considered within the Cowan Park Enterprise and Community Hub. The Director of Environment advised that he would take forward the consideration of this within the project or at the Young Enterprise Scotland (YES) premises at Rouken Glen Park Training Centre.

Councillor O'Donnell thanked the Director of Environment for the resourcefulness employed to ensure the required funding and noted the anticipation of the project from the local community.

The Cabinet noted the:-

- (a) progress of the Cowan Park Enterprise and Community Hub project;
- (b) increased capital work costs and additional funding of £200,000 secured from the Scottish Government; and
- (c) urgent variation to the contract to allow the project to be completed.

CHAIR

