

MEETING:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Growing Barnsley Workstream
DATE:	Tuesday 25 June 2024
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Council Chamber, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors Stowe (Chair), Barnard, Bellamy, Booker, Bowser, Denton, Eastwood, Hayward, Holling, Hunt, Lodge, McCarthy, Mitchell, Morrell, Moyes, Osborne, Pickering, Webster and N. Wright together with co-opted member L Iles.

5 Apologies for Absence - Parent Governor Representatives

No apologies for absence were received.

6 Declarations of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interest

Councillor Bowser declared a non-pecuniary interest as Cabinet Support Member Core Services.

Councillor Lodge declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Berneslai Homes tenant and as an employee of an Organisation commissioned by Barnsley Council.

Councillor Osborne declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Berneslai Homes Board and Cabinet Support Member Environment and Highways.

7 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2024 were received.

8 The Council Plan 2024-27

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Sarah Norman, Chief Executive, Barnsley Council
- Wendy Popplewell, Executive Director for Core Services, Barnsley Council
- Michael Potter, Service Director for Business Intelligence, HR and Communications, Barnsley Council
- Chris Blackburn, Head of Service for Business Intelligence, Barnsley Council
- Councillor Robert Frost, Cabinet Spokesperson for Core Services, Barnsley Council

Councillor Frost provided members with a brief overview of the Council Plan 2024-2027. Members heard how the Council Plan was based on ambitions and priorities for Barnsley as set out in the Barnsley 2030 plan.

In the ensuing discussion and in response to detailed questioning and challenge, the following matters were highlighted:-

Members enquired as to what the long-term plans would be after 2027. In response members were informed that any future changes would correlate with the Barnsley 2030 plan. The Barnsley 2030 Board were undertaking a stocktake against the 2030 plan in order to synthesise it and look at the outcomes later in the year and this would inform future plans going forward. The proposed Council Plan to 2027 pulled together all the exciting things happening in Barnsley and would evolve with new initiatives and development in order to create new plans in the future.

The Critical Success Factors were reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis with a press release in the Barnsley Chronicle. These were designed for public consumption containing informative data around the challenges and successes that the council had. The critical success factors sat at the top of a pyramid containing a wealth of information on a variety of issues such as recycling rates, educational performance and many more reports that were of interest to the public.

The critical success factors were created from the most ambitious outcomes. Work had been undertaken with officers at Directorate level in individual teams as to what priorities they had and what key pieces of work they had in order to build a framework to create the top points of the pyramid. In order to measure the critical success factors, the ones selected were the ones most indicative of what the council was trying to achieve. It was reported that some indicators always performed well and this was not seen as a stretch or test so the ones chosen were the most useful as a barometer for performing against the plan.

There had been substantial community engagement in order to help create the Barnsley 2030 plan including residents being surveyed, focus groups being held, Area Teams had been engaged with and there had been communications work with partners and staff. This work had informed the four key outcomes of Healthy, Growing, Learning and Sustainable Barnsley. The priorities within those outcomes had helped to develop the Council Plan. Members commented that the wider community input could be provided by Ward Alliance engagements within communities. Officers commented that they would take this away to look into as it could help with the Barnsley 2030 stocktake to create a richer picture of where the Borough was as a place.

Officers were confident of the quality of the data supplied as it came under substantial scrutiny. Members were informed that Business Intelligence worked closely with Directorates to look at the data supplied before publishing.

Members queried how it was known that the council were delivering a quality service. They were informed that critical success factors were not just about data but that indicators of quality could be an inspection or outcome based activities and awards. An example was provided of a recent Adult Social Care Survey that had been reported into central government and had been benchmarked against statistical neighbours regionally and nationally. Members heard that a theme of measures ran through the Plan to prove value for money which were detailed in each Directorate.

In terms of judging measures and whether a Service was not delivering, members were informed that when they are reviewed at Senior Management Team meetings, Services were expected to explain their action plans to address the issue. However, it was acknowledged that there would be a need to understand the full picture as some factors were out of the control of services. It was reported that deep dive reports could be requested to challenge services to look into any issues.

Members were informed that a lot of critical success factors were statutory returns reported to Government that have had independent oversights such as the DFE who would look over Children's Services. A wealth of statistical data would be provided which was quality controlled and audited by them.

Members were informed that the aim was for the local authority to be an intelligence led organisation and this would be reliant on the data the authority already had alongside residents' opinions via surveys. It was reported that a number of surveys were sent out to the public on a regular basis such as Adult Social care and Berneslai Homes Tenants in order to form a richer picture. However, it was noted that to carry out surveys to all residents would be an expensive operation but could be considered in the future.

Members queried the level of detail published within the Council Plan around priorities and actions taken to achieve the various aspects within the Plan compared to other Authorities who had published significantly more detailed information. Members were informed that it was not a statutory requirement to produce a Council Plan and that it was more good practice therefore there was no guidance as to what was required of the level of detail to be published. The approach for this plan was to ensure that the public reading it didn't feel overwhelmed with information, however, if they did wish to read further information there were links embedded in order to do so.

Members were informed that there would be an all Member Information Briefing on the Council Plan in order for members to understand how to support, engage and become ambassadors for the plan.

In relation to the finances to support the proposals within the Plan, it was noted that there were tensions within the budget in certain areas such as statutory Adult and Children's Social Care Services and the activity under the Growing and Sustainable Barnsley outcomes which were less statutory but of critical importance to residents. Members were informed that the tensions would endeavour to be managed through the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Barnsley 2030 vision and Board was a powerful mechanism to get all agencies working together in the same direction. Examples were provided of shared initiatives such as Health on the High Street which was a shared endeavour with the Hospital, Barnsley Premier Leisure and South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SWYPFT). The Children's Services Academy had been created in collaboration with Barnsley College to provide young people with pathways to employment within the Council to cover shortfalls in future roles.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;

- (ii) that the witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution;
- (iii) that witnesses consider discussing plans for the Barnsley 2030 stocktake with Area Councils and Ward Alliances to amplify community input into the priorities and outcomes; and
- (iv) that witnesses ensure there are clear links between the Council Plan and organisational plans and enabling strategies to support the overarching ambitions.

9 Microsoft Dynamic 365 Implementation and Impact

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Wendy Popplewell, Executive Director, Core Services, Barnsley Council
- David Robinson, Service Director for Customer Information and Digital Services, Barnsley Council
- Kerry Robinson, Head of Transformation, Barnsley Council
- Councillor Robert Frost, Cabinet Spokesperson for Core Services, Barnsley Council

Councillor Frost provided members of the Committee with an overview of the implementation of the Microsoft Dynamics Software Tool which was to help manage work and interact with customers in a more dynamic way.

Members were provided with a video demonstration of the first implementation in the Bulky Waste Service.

In the ensuing discussion and in response to detailed questioning and challenge, the following matters were highlighted:-

Members raised concerns around the security risks of using artificial intelligence in software such as Copilot and the potential threat to the Council with information gathering software. It was reported that artificial intelligence was in widespread use, and that any software the Council had would be used responsibly and in line with existing policies. Officers acknowledged that there would always be someone trying to access data but that it was secure in the Cloud storage via a large provider (Microsoft) which mitigated the risk to the best of the Council's abilities.

Queries were raised around the procurement process and how many businesses had been considered. Members heard how it had to be a robust process with tried and tested suppliers who offered a large amount of security. Members were informed that a strategy had been formulated around Microsoft Products and that they were one of the biggest providers in terms of security and continual product development.

Members were informed that the implementation of the new programmes would run until July 2024 which was a couple of months behind schedule. It was envisaged that the development of other products would be on an agile basis for best value in other areas.

The benefits to customers would include more ways of being able to contact the Council and at any time of the day. The customer experience would be more joined up with first contact being through chat bots automating answers for customers which would free up some human resources. It was acknowledged that digital inclusivity was at the forefront of these programmes being implemented and that no other channels for contacting the council would be removed in the immediate future but that this would need to be reviewed on a regular basis. Impact assessments had been carried out prior to the programmes being implemented around various aspects including inclusivity as it was important people were armed with transacting digitally.

Members were informed that new ways of interacting with the Council were introduced on a soft launch basis so as to not disadvantage anyone immediately. The pockets of members of the community who would be unable to use the technology introduced would be signposted to various initiatives and resources available. Members were informed that ultimately ringing and speaking to people cost a significant amount of money and created considerable waiting times for people. The digital service would cut down of both of these issues.

Members were concerned around the amount of 'clicks' required for creating an account, in response they were informed that this would be the initial sign up to the account and once created this would result in much quicker experience.

Work was being carried out to introduce an elected members portal to be able to report and see the status of any jobs requested. Members queried whether there could be a function included to report jobs to Berneslai Homes. It was noted that as they were an external organisation, this could be looked at as an iteration in the future.

Members praised and welcomed the new project but raised concerns around the costs involved with external consultants in order to create and implement these programmes. Officers acknowledged that attracting IT programmers and keeping them was something all councils struggled with as once trained they can earn more in the private sector. Members were informed that the intention was to build systems that could be replicated easily and train people up to create them. The aim was to create a sustainable programme that could be rolled out to other services in the future. Members noted that conversations were due to take place with other local authorities who had adopted the same Microsoft software to share technology ideas and the effects of similar processes.

A key aspect of having Microsoft as prime provider was as a way of future proofing systems. The running systems would constantly be updated and the Council can select which services to use that are on offer. It also ensured that the council received the best value for money.

Members asked when the changes would take place for members to report in various issues in their communities. They were informed that that would remain the same for the time being as there would be a transitional period for the new portal.

Members queried the security of using certain applications on private devices that are also to be used for Council business. They were informed that IT Services are able to build in a partition on private devices to split council information from private

and in the unfortunate event that a phone is stolen or lost they are also able to remotely wipe the information from the device.

Members were encouraged to be involved in the user led development of Microsoft 365 products in order to provide feedback for better outcomes.

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the witnesses be thanked for their attendance and contribution;
- (iii) that witnesses continue to consider those who are digitally excluded to ensure fair and equal access to services and support;
- (iv) that witnesses consider the option to prioritise jobs/requests based on vulnerability;
- (v) that witnesses consider user-led development of the system by working with elected members. This should include looking at the 'front-end', determining how members can use the system to report issues and receive status updates relating to their Wards; and
- (vi) that witnesses deliver training and development to elected members so that they can champion the system and support communities to access it.

10 Response to the Commercial Contract Management Task and Finish Group (FOR INFORMATION ONLY)

The following witnesses were welcomed to the meeting:

- Wendy Popplewell, Executive Director – Core Services, Barnsley Council
- Jenny Lockwood, Head of Service, Strategic Purchasing, Procurement and Contract Management, Barnsley Council
- Councillor Robert Frost, Cabinet Spokesperson for Core Services, Barnsley Council

Councillor Forst provided members with brief overview of a report from Core Services outlining the response to the findings and recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Commercial Contract Management Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Barnard received the report and drew members attention to a letter addressed to the Secretary of State following the conclusion of deliberations by the Task and Finish Group, and the subsequent reply from the Minister.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and received with thanks to the officers involved in the investigation.

Chair