



MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE HELD AT MOSSLEY MILL ON TUESDAY 5 JANUARY 2021 AT 6.30 PM

In the Chair:	Alderman P Brett
Members Present:	Aldermen - F Agnew and P Michael Councillors – H Cushinan, S Flanagan, R Foster, P Hamill, L Irwin, N Kelly, V McAuley, S Ross, M Stewart and R Wilson
Non Committee Members:	Councillors – A Bennington, R Lynch V McWilliam, and B Webb
Officers Present:	Director of Finance & Governance – S Cole Director of Organisation Development – A McCooke Head of Finance – J Balmer Borough Lawyer and Head of Legal Services – P Casey Head of Governance – L Johnston Head of ICT – G Smyth ICT Helpdesk Officer – J Wilson Member Services Officer – S Boyd

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the January Meeting of the Policy and Governance Committee, wished everyone a Happy New Year, and reminded all present of recording requirements.

In order to protect public health during the current COVID-19 emergency it was not possible to allow the public or the press to physically attend the meeting. The public and the press can access those parts of the meeting which they are entitled to attend via live stream (a link to which is on the Council website). The meeting minutes and audio recording would be published on the Council's website.

1. APOLOGIES

None

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

3. ITEMS FOR DECISION

3.1 G/BCEP/002 EMERGENCY PLANNING - NEW PANDEMIC PLAN

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 requires various organisations, including the Council, to prepare for adverse events and incidents.

In March 2020 the Coronavirus Pandemic raised unprecedented impacts across the world, previously not experienced outside third world countries. Under the Leadership of the Chief Executive, the Strategic Response team effectively managed through phases one and two of the pandemic utilising a combination of existing emergency plans, including the Emergency Plan, Flu Plan and Standard Operating Procedure.

Using the recent Council experience of the COVID-19 pandemic a new Pandemic Plan (circulated) has been drafted to replace the Flu Plan. It has strong COVID elements but will be useful for any other type of pandemic such as new strains of Flu, measles, cholera, ebola or any other global infection. The plan has been approved by the Corporate Leadership Team and Equality Screened with guidance from the Accessibility Officer (circulated).

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Councillor Flanagan and agreed that

the new Pandemic Plan be approved.

ACTION BY: Elaine Girvan, Corporate Health and Safety Manager

3.2 G/BCEP/009 CLIMATE CHANGE WORKING GROUP MINUTES

The minutes of the third Climate Change Working Group, which took place on 2 December 2020, were circulated.

In summary, as well as a joint presentation by SIB and the Department for the Economy on the Circular Economy, Members were updated on:

- Vehicle Strategy
- EMS External Audit Outcome
- Officer Climate Change Working Group

Officers were preparing an Action Plan for approval at the next meeting of the Working Group.

Proposed by Councillor Hamill
Seconded by Councillor Irwin and agreed that

the minutes of the Climate Change Working Group be approved.

ACTION BY: Liz Johnston, Head of Governance

4 ITEMS FOR NOTING

4.1 CE/OA/005 NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION (NILGA) DECEMBER 2020 BULLETIN

Members were advised that NILGA had circulated the December 2020 Bulletin and a copy was circulated for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the NILGA December 2020 Bulletin be noted.

NO ACTION

4.2 G-LEG-325/5 DEPARTMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE - THE PRIVATE STREETS (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 1980 – DEVELOPMENT AT WILLENDALE, BALLYCLARE

Correspondence had been received from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) advising that streets at the above development had now been adopted by DfI Roads (correspondence circulated).

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the correspondence be noted.

ACTION BY: Deirdre Nelson, Paralegal

4.3 G/MSMO/41 MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Members were advised that during the previous term of Council, it was agreed that attendance records for each of the Council and Committee meetings be summarised on a six monthly basis (June-November) and published on the Council's website.

A summary sheet had been prepared showing the total attendance for the period August to November 2020 (reduced to four months due to the previous reporting having been extended to eight months to include the meetings up to and including the Annual Meeting), and, was circulated for Members' information prior to publication on the Council's website.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the summary sheet recording Members' attendance for each of the Council meetings and Committee Member attendance for each of the Committee meetings for the period from August to November 2020 be noted.

ACTION BY: Member Services

4.4 FI/FIN/044 FINANCE AND PAYROLL SOFTWARE IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT UPDATE

Members recalled that an update was brought to the September Policy and Governance Committee on the implementation of the Finance and Payroll Software Project.

It was agreed that Members would be kept updated on the continued progress and a project updated report was circulated for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.5 HR/HR/019 AGENCY STAFF UPDATE

Members were reminded that agency staff are used across the Council to provide temporary cover for absence such as:

- Maternity leave
- Secondments
- Sickness absence
- Vacant posts

The use of agency staff is subject to a rigorous approval process, which requires the approval of the Corporate Leadership Team and there is budgetary provision for the majority of posts filled via departmental salary budgets, salary contingency and grant funding.

The table appended provided an update for Members on the use of agency staff as at November 2020 as compared to November 2019. It excluded limited ad-hoc agency cover, which is necessary to provide operational cover, at short notice (circulated Appendix 1).

Appendix 2 (circulated) set out expenditure on agency workers in November 2020.

The cost of agency staff had decreased for the period of 1 April 2020 to 30 November 2020 at 4.28% of all staffing costs compared to 7.13% for the same period last year. Agency expenditure had significantly reduced following the release of agency workers in May 2020.

Members had previously requested clarification on parity of pay and annual leave for agency workers. All agency workers receive the same pay and basic annual leave entitlement as a council employee, from the commencement of their assignment with the Council.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.6 HR/ER/003 ENGAGEMENT AND WELLBEING STRATEGY 2016/2020 - HEALTH AND WELLBEING PROGRAMME UPDATE

Members were reminded that our Engagement and Wellbeing Strategy initiatives were tailored to ensure that we establish workplace interventions to support the mental health of our staff, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

The purpose of this report was to provide Members with an update on the Wellbeing workplace interventions that have been delivered to date.

Workplace Interventions

Training was delivered to help support staff in areas such as Emotional Resilience, Motivating & Leading Remote Teams. Mental Health First Aid training was also delivered for staff and Elected Members.

During Covid-19, especially during lockdown, staff and Members were supported to look after their mental and physical health with a number of e-zines and programmes signposting to organisations that offer support. Some self-help options were also developed such as the Stress Control, Mindfulness and Work/Life balance sessions all delivered via the Northern Trust. Covid-19 Wellbeing, Lifeline and Samaritans information was, and will continue to be, shared and promoted.

To maintain Healthy Lifestyles, 'Men's Health Week' was promoted which explored how the health of men has been impacted by COVID and offered practical ways to help.

Flu clinics were also held with a total of 90 availing of the free vaccine.

To further raise awareness relating to Mental Health, a week of activities was delivered to mark World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2020. We introduced our 29 trained Mental Health Champions (2 shared their personal stories, received well across the organisation), and many Managers also took part in our Tea 'n' Talk sessions with their teams.

Positively, following Mental Health week, a further 16 staff and 2 Councillors successfully completed Mental Health First Aid training and join our current team which now stands at 36.

At a regional level, the Local Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy was launched in October and the Council continues to participate in the working group.

Next Steps

Due to the success of our Mental Health Champion network, we will continue to raise awareness of Mental Health issues through that successful team.

To lend support relating to financial matters, the Money Advice and Pension Service (MaPS) website will be further promoted to assist with advice related to topics such as debt, pensions, mortgages, budgeting etc.

Also planned are some 'Lunch and Learn' information sessions for staff on a range of subjects, along with further promotions for 'Mindfulness' and 'Resilience' training to support staff after a stressful year. The Action Cancer Bus and Keep Well Van visits are programmed to take place in spring.

The full range of key initiatives were noted within the Programme, circulated for Members' information.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.7 G/IG/008 ICO DATA SHARING CODE

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) submitted its Data Sharing Code to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on 17 December 2020.

The code provides practical advice to businesses and organisations on how to carry out responsible data sharing. Additional information and resources will be available on the ICO website. The Information Commissioner had stated that she does not see the publication or laying of the Code as a conclusion, but as a milestone on the continuing work that the ICO and other stakeholders are doing to enable individuals and organisations to data share with confidence.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.8 FI/FIN/045 DETAILS ON RATE SETTING PROCESS 2021/22 AND RELATED GENERAL ESTIMATES OF RATES FORM AND IMPACT OF COVID ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCES

Members were advised that correspondence (circulated) had been received from the Department for Communities in relation to the Rates Setting Process for 2021/22.

Under the Local Government Finance Act Northern Ireland 2011, District Councils are obliged to set the estimates of rates before 15 February each year. District councils are also obliged under the Rates Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007 to set district rates no later than this date.

Due to the current COVID-19 emergency situation **the rate setting date will be changed to 1 March** for the 2021/22 financial year. Formal confirmation of this will follow once the necessary regulation amendments are made.

Members were also advised that a report (circulated) had also been sent to Department for Communities and Department of Finance from SOLACE highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on Local Government finances and requesting central government support. This report had been endorsed by NILGA.

It was clear that COVID-19 has presented unprecedented financial challenges for Local Government finances and services in Northern Ireland.

Significant Central Government support had been committed to compensate Councils for this in the Current financial year.

Many of these financial pressures will continue beyond March 2021, presenting significant challenges for Councils when striking their rates for 2021/22.

The report presented an analysis of Local Government finances together with the financial challenges and associated assumptions currently informing Council rates positions across Northern Ireland as each Council works towards striking an affordable rate for 21/22.

The continued uncertainty makes estimating financial impacts challenging; however best case and worse case scenarios have been presented in this report. The support requested from Government is set out in section 7 of the report.

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

4.9 CCS/GEN/009 LAUNCH OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON LEGISLATIVE OPTIONS TO INFORM THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADULT PROTECTION BILL FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Members were advised that the Department of Health is undertaking a public consultation on legislative options to inform the development of an Adult Protection Bill for Northern Ireland.

Members were advised that further details can be found via the NI Direct consultation link <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/doh-1/legislative-options-for-adult-protection>

Proposed by Councillor Wilson
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the report be noted.

NO ACTION

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Hamill
Seconded by Councillor Flanagan and agreed that

the following Committee business be taken In Confidence and the livestream and audio recording would cease.

Members were advised that the livestream and audio recording would cease at this point.

5 ITEMS IN CONFIDENCE

5.1 IN CONFIDENCE ICT/GEN/40 ICT CAPITAL EXPENDITURE PLANNING

Members approved a budget of £[REDACTED] for ICT in the 2020/21 at the October 2019 Corporate Workshop as part of the capital program for Council. Members were aware that, due to the uncertainty with COVID-19, a hold was placed on capital expenditure across Council. This resulted in a number of planned ICT projects being postponed and alternative, short term steps taken to ensure the robustness of the ICT Infrastructure could be maintained during the course of the pandemic.

Since March 2020, the ICT department had incurred spend of approximately £30,000 to directly support the organisation during the pandemic. The bulk of this money was spent on laptops and remote connectivity licensing that had been vital in providing staff the ability to work effectively at home.

It was anticipated that this expenditure can be recouped through funding coming from the Department for Communities.

This report outlined some of the key ICT infrastructure projects that have been deferred but now must be addressed in order to continue to offer a high level

of ICT Service across the organisation and reduce the likelihood of higher repairs and maintenance costs going forward and also risk of interruption of service

ICT Replacement

The ICT replacement scheme, is a rolling project that would involve the replacement of desktop PCs, laptops and other ICT infrastructure that is no longer in warranty.

In order to ensure the IT estate is fit for purpose, it is vitally important that our equipment is under warranty and can be replaced or repaired without unnecessary delays.

Expenditure Required:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
£ [REDACTED]	£ [REDACTED]	£ [REDACTED]

Network Switch Replacement

Network Switches are the core technology that makes up the Council's network infrastructure, with 96 Switches located throughout all of our Council buildings.

During the merger period in 2015, the existing two Council networks were joined together, however no money was spent to upgrade at that time. The Network switches as a whole are now a minimum of 10 years old and out of warranty.

Due to reduced expenditure, ICT obtained a small stock of second hand switches that could be used to keep things operational during the pandemic, however we are now in a situation where this needs to be addressed.

Expenditure Required:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
£ [REDACTED]	-	-

Storage Area Network

The Storage Area Network (SAN) is the main storage that is connected to our Virtual Server infrastructure – similar to a hard drive in a PC but on a much larger scale, with several layers of management services.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

As the SANs are critical to ICT operations, it is vital that we ensure they are under support from the manufacturer. The support had been extended until early 2022 at which point our current equipment will become end of life and therefore unsupported.

Expenditure Required:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
-	£ [REDACTED]	-

Firewalls

Council Firewalls are the first line of defence against cyber-attacks and form the backbone of our ICT security.

The current Firewalls were purchased in 2014 as part of the merger process and have been maintained and updated throughout the years to ensure they are providing optimal levels of security.

In order to maximise our current investment and reduce the need for capital expenditure in the short term, ICT have worked with the supplier to increase our support coverage and improve our SLA should there be a hardware failure.

The improved support coverage will now mean we don't have to look at replacing the firewalls until 2023/24, however it was highlighted that this expenditure will be required during that financial year.

Expenditure Required:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
-	-	£ [REDACTED]

Wireless Network

The wireless network currently in use across Council was installed in 2014 and provides network or internet access within all of our Council facilities.

Although still functioning to a high level, some expenditure will be required to replace aging wireless access points across several of our buildings.

The upgraded equipment will future-proof the network, ensuring that the highest services possible can be provided to both staff and visitors.

Expenditure Required:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
£ [REDACTED]	-	-

ANBorough App

The ANBorough App was launched in September 2019 and to date had in excess of 10,000 downloads.

The app provides a convenient way for the ratepayer to access key Council services, just as bin collection dates, and Leisure bookings.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions imposed on many of our service areas, no further development was done on the app. However in order to keep ANBorough as fresh and functional as possible, expenditure would be required during 2021/22

Expenditure Required:

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
£ [REDACTED]	-	-

Summary

ICT had taken a number of steps to not only maximise our existing ICT investment but also to reduce the short term need for capital expenditure. However the projects highlighted above will require future investment in order to continue to deliver the high level of ICT service required across Council.

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
ICT Replacement	£ [REDACTED]	£ [REDACTED]	£ [REDACTED]
Network Switch Replacement	£ [REDACTED]	-	-
Storage Area Network	-	£ [REDACTED]	-
Firewalls	-	-	£ [REDACTED]
Wireless Network	£ [REDACTED]	-	-
ANBorough App	£ [REDACTED]		
Total	£ [REDACTED]	£ [REDACTED]	£ [REDACTED]

This spend represented a decrease of £ [REDACTED] from the original 2020/21 budget and would ensure the robustness of our systems into the future. The capital will be factored into the Medium Term Financial Plan which will be presented during Rates Estimate.

Following a Member's question the Head of ICT provided Members with clarity on the disposal of redundant equipment.

Proposed by Alderman Michael
Seconded by Councillor Foster and agreed that

the ICT Capital Expenditure as outlined above be approved.

ACTION BY: Graham Smyth, Head of ICT

PROPOSAL TO PROCEED OUT OF 'IN CONFIDENCE'

Proposed by Councillor Foster
Seconded by Councillor Wilson and agreed that

the remainder of Committee business be taken in Open Session.

The Chairperson advised that audio-recording would recommence at this point.

There being no further Committee business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 6.40 pm.

MAYOR

Council Minutes have been redacted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation, and legal advice.