

## REPORT TO ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL – 26 SEPTEMBER 2019

### AREA IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP – REPORT OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 1 Recommendations

The Council is recommended to:

- 1.1 Consider the recommendations of the Area Improvement Working Group as contained within Appendix 1 of this report and the proposed Action Plan contained within Appendix 2; and
- 1.2 to re-establish the Area Improvement Working Group with an amended remit to allow it to monitor and ensure the implementation of the Action Plan, and notes that any further decision-making will be referred to the Procedures Committee.

#### 2 Background / Discussion

- 2.1 At its meeting on 22 November, 2018, the Council established the Area Improvement Working Group with the following remit:

To consider the cultural and behavioural aspects of area working; engage and consult with relevant stakeholders and partners; and make recommendations to Full Council on proposed improvements to include but not be limited to consideration of the following:

- The ethos of community-based decision making
- Effective communication between Services, Areas and Councillors
- Co-ordination of cross-service Area Plans (including the Health & Social Care Partnership)
- Inclusive cross-working practices
- Effective consultation with the Area Committees
- Optimum line management of Area Managers
- Ambassadors and Leaders at a local level

- 2.2 The Working Group has met on five occasions this year – 31 January, 6 March, 18 April, 13 June and 30 August to consider matters outlined in their report attached at Appendix 1. The Working Group have now completed the considerations phase of their work and wish to make recommendations to Council.

- 2.3 The recommendations of the Working Group are contained within **Appendix 1** to this report.
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- 2.4 An Action Plan for ongoing work in relation to the cultural and behavioural aspects of Area Working is attached at **Appendix 2**. It is proposed that the Council agree that officers continue to pursue the actions outlined and enable the Area Improvement Working Group to monitor progress. Any matters affecting the Scheme of Governance requiring further decision-making should be referred to the Procedures Committee for onward recommendations if necessary being made to Full Council.
- 2.5 In order to give the Area Improvement Working Group that ongoing monitoring role, it is recommended that the Working Group be re-established with the following remit:

To monitor the progress towards delivering the actions contained in the Action Plan in relation to the cultural and behavioural aspects of area working so as to ensure implementation of the agreed actions; and to make recommendations, where necessary, to the Procedures Committee on any proposed improvements affecting the Scheme of Governance arising from the Action Plan.

- 2.6 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

### **3 Scheme of Governance**

- 3.1 The Council is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of its general remit in Section A of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as a matter relevant to all six administrative areas of the Council and not otherwise delegated to a Committee.

### **4 Implications and Risk**

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment is not required because no actions or decisions are recommended in this report that would result in a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 4.2 The Action Plan contains significant development work for officers across the Council although this is anticipated to be subsumed into current staffing complement. There are no direct financial implications arising as a result of the recommendations contained in the report.
- 4.3 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level: *Business and organisational change; Corporate Risk Register*. The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level *Community Empowerment (Directorate Risk Registers)*.

## APPENDIX 1

### Recommendations to Full Council of the Area Improvement Working Group

#### 1. Ethos of Community Based Decision Making

The group identified strong Leadership, both political and officer, in reinforcing the continued importance of Area Working as being crucial to its ongoing success. Fundamental to reinforcing this message is a heightened profile for the ethos of Area Working for staff, stakeholders and partner organisations. The group were keen to stress that strong Partnership working locally can be built from local Councillor's knowledge of their communities and of how to get things done. The group were committed to a strong Area role in Strategic and Corporate matters and recognised that this was dependent upon a sound Councillor understanding of the competing aspects of Council work and were of the view that this could only be enhanced by an ongoing dialogue with local members and effective communication between services, policy committees and the area dimension.

The group recognised, as key to community based decision making, the importance of locally generated agendas and in particular the value of Notices of Motion and Member Promoted Issues in achieving greater and wider involvement of local members in contributing to Area Committee agendas.

Recent examples of good practice in this regard were noted to be the inclusion of a higher profile for the area dimension in the council's corporate induction programme and the establishment of informal meetings of Area Committees with Service Management teams at 6 monthly intervals.

**Recommendation – A strong Leadership (Political and Officer) message reinforcing the importance of Area Working be embedded in the organisation. Instruct the Chief Executive to demonstrate an ongoing programme of actions directed at this principle.**

**Recommendation – The Chief Executive include within an the ongoing programme of actions directed at the principle of the importance of Area Working, ways of promoting, supporting and providing additional awareness training to members of the principle.**

#### 2. Effective Communication between Services, Areas and Councillors

The group recognised that the Scrutiny role envisaged in the most recent Scheme of Governance modernisation is not currently being sufficiently fulfilled by Committees and acknowledged that work was already underway to address this aspect. Whilst the scrutiny role is important in linking the policy work of the Council to the local needs represented by the Area Committees, the group felt that fundamentally the requirement to put local needs into Strategic Planning and Policy had to be from the bottom upwards and so underlined once again the necessity for Area engagement in strategic policy-making at the earliest opportunity in the journey of policy-making or policy review. The group believed there requires to be a renewed clarity of Leadership messages both political and

officer to ensure that bottom-up approach is achieved. The group recognised that Area Management Teams were not all working effectively and wished to see more work done by officers to address this aspect. The group also had concerns that multi-disciplinary working and cross-service working was not optimum and invites officers and partners to focus upon these complex yet crucially important features of working with our communities to achieve local outcomes.

The Group were pleased to have the assurance of officers that the fundamentals of good communication from services to locality, for example, ensuring priority responses to Councillors within 5 working days, would receive a refreshed approach.

**Recommendation – Officers to undertake further work on cross- service, multi-disciplinary practice with key stakeholders and partners to ensure coherent, effective and timely communication.**

**Recommendation – Group Leaders on behalf of elected members reaffirm their continued commitment to policy-making being driven from a local “bottom-up” approach and that Area Committees are central to the success of that approach.**

### **3. Co-ordination of Cross-Services Area Plans (Including HSCP)**

The Working Group recognised that the key to effective locality outcomes lay in the coordination of Cross-Service Area Plans that could strike a balance between Strategic and Local and ensure that the complexities of multi-service delivery could be managed in an area setting. They recognised that the development of Cross-Service Area Plans was a detailed body of work outwith the scope of the Group but strongly reinforced the need for this type of planning. In taking forward this work outwith the Group, they were of the view that Councillors offer a cross-service / community view that can reduce the risk of “Silo Working” and this should be built-in to any planning framework for Cross-Service Area Plans.

The Group were encouraged to hear of significant developments already being progressed that would underpin this work – the exploration of Asset Place Based Planning by the Area Manager for Marr; the Peterhead Masterplan by the Area Manager for Buchan; and Community Planning Partnership streamlining by the Area Manager for Garioch.

**Recommendation – Officers to further develop and bring forward proposals on a planning framework for Cross-Service Area Plans including, but not limited to, how to maximise Councillors cross-service knowledge so as to reduce the potential for silo working.**

### **4. Inclusive Cross - Working Practices**

There was a strong degree of overlap between this remit and the previous one “Co-ordination of Cross Services Area Plans (Including HSCP)” The Working Group recognised that the local knowledge of Area Management Teams is vital and bearing in mind its conclusion at 2. above that “Area Management Teams were not all working effectively”, encouraged that the work recommended at 3 above on a planning framework for Cross-Service Area Plans include the

consideration of the role of an effective Area Management Team component or the like.

**Recommendation – as for 3. above - Officers to further develop and bring forward proposals on a planning framework for Cross-Service Area Plans including, but not limited to, an analysis of the role of an effective Area Management Team component or the like.**

#### **5. Effective Consultation to give influence to Area Committees**

Whilst the Working Group endorsed the latest Scheme of Governance's provision for local agenda setting, they questioned whether the Scheme was being used as effectively as it could be. No suggestions were forthcoming in respect of changes required to the Scheme itself but rather firmer adherence to its current provisions was recognised as being required. The Group underlined the need for support to Area Committees and effective consultation to unlock a strong local knowledge-provided by local councillors. As referred to in remit 2. above, the necessity for area engagement at the earliest opportunity in the journey of strategic policy-making or policy review is crucial and the Working Group stressed again the importance of policy papers being presented to areas first. The group recognised further work was required here to make this long-established principle work in practice and to achieve respect for engagement with Area Committees whose views should be given authoritative regard.

**Recommendation – the Council makes a commitment to devolved decision-making and empowered Area Committees which have genuine influence in practice as well as in principle. Officers bring forward improvements to the Policy Development and Review Framework to provide sufficient time for Area Committee consultation and to ensure Policy Committees can give appropriate consideration to Area Committee responses.**

#### **6. Optimum Line Management of Area Managers**

The Working Group were inclined to the view that line management of Area Managers should return to the Chief Executive so as to achieve a better connection to Senior Leadership Team. However, the Group recognised that a more detailed consideration of all of the options for structuring of senior officers was necessary. Whilst the Group recognised that more work was required in order to achieve that better connection, this would in the first instance be aided by the clarification of the Area Manager role. The Working Group expressed the desire for Area Managers to be better involved in and informed of key decisions that will impact on their local area and for Area Managers to be the local face of the Council dedicated to each area.

**Recommendations – that the Council reaffirm its' commitment to a decentralised model and the principle that the Area Manager is the senior representative of the Council locally. It is recommended that the Chief Executive consider the options for the structure and working approach of senior officers so as to demonstrate and measure better engagement of, and input from, Area Managers to the Strategic Leadership Team.**

**APPENDIX 2**

(DRAFT) ACTION PLAN- AREA WORKING

ACTION	OWNER	MILESTONES	TIMESCALE
<p><b>Demonstrate an ongoing programme of actions directed at the principle of the importance of Area Working being embedded in the organisation.</b></p>	<p><b>Chief Executive</b></p>	<p>Programme agreed and launched</p> <p>Detailed milestones of programme progressed</p>	<p>December 2019</p> <p>In line with programme</p>
<p><b>Further work on cross-service, multi-disciplinary practice with key stakeholders and partners to ensure coherent, effective and timely communication.</b></p>	<p><b>Ritchie Johnson/Chief Officers</b></p>	<p>Refresh &amp; reinforcement of existing working protocols for communication &amp; engagement with Local Cllrs</p>	<p>December 2019</p>
<p><b>Proposals be brought forward on a planning framework for Cross-Service Area Plans including how to maximise Councillors cross-service knowledge so as to reduce the potential for silo working, and including an analysis of the role of an effective Area Management Team component or the like.</b></p>	<p><b>Ritchie Johnson/Area Managers/Chief Officers</b></p>	<p>Further development of approach to cross-service area plans – preferred approach agreed</p> <p>Implementation &amp; roll-out of agreed approach</p> <p>Review &amp; refresh of area management team working approaches across all areas</p>	<p>Spring 2020</p> <p>Summer 2020</p> <p>February 2020</p>

<p><b>Proposals be brought forward for improvements to the Policy Development and Review Framework to provide sufficient time for Area Committee consultation and to ensure Policy Committees can give appropriate consideration to Area Committee responses.</b></p>	<p><b>Ritchie Johnson/Chief Officers</b></p>	<p>Reinforcement of existing policy &amp; procedure requirements on Area consultation</p> <p>Review of Committee Forward planner to ensure consultation arrangements in place</p> <p>Scrutiny Review of Council's policy development approach</p>	<p>November 2019</p> <p>November 2019</p> <p>Spring 2020</p>
<p><b>Consideration of the options for structure of senior officers so as to ensure a better connection of Area Managers to the Strategic Leadership Team including clarification of the Area Manager role.</b></p>	<p><b>Chief Executive</b></p>	<p>Review of current working arrangements &amp; implementation of early identified improvements</p> <p>Development of longer-term options including full appraisal for further consideration</p>	<p>December 2019</p> <p>Spring 2020</p>

