



# Northumberland County Council

Corporate Services OSC

Monday, 27 November 2023

## **BEST Update**

**Report of Councillor(s)** Cllr Richard Wearmouth, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources

**Responsible Officer(s):** Jan Willis, Executive Director for Resources & Transformation (S151)

### **1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to “Value for Money”, “Enabling Growth” and “Tackling Inequalities” priorities included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2018-2021.

### **2. Purpose of report**

To update on progress made on the current programme of works with BEST, the council's new way of working.

### **3. Recommendations**

To note the progress made to date on the programme or work and the proposed next steps.

To discuss a forward plan of deep dives into specific workstream to be brought to overview and scrutiny.

### **4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

Not applicable

### **5. Background**

BEST is the council's new way of working:

- It enables the council to give residents the best experiences through its services.
- It opens up opportunities and broadens experience for staff.

- It is the Council becoming more financially efficient and ensuring VFM is achieved.

The strategic business case, sponsored and led by the Executive Director of Transformation and Resources, was approved by Cabinet on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023 and is the high-level strategic document that helped to begin the journey, identifying a programme of work under seven workstreams and encompassing around forty projects that are now being developed under BEST. This is not about cutting services, but about moving to a new way of working, transforming the way services are delivered and how the Council operates to deliver value for money and achieve the best outcomes for our customers and residents.

On 14 March 2023, Cabinet made the key decision to proceed with the tendering and procurement of a Delivery Partner who will work alongside council officers in delivering the priorities identified in the strategic business case and support the design and delivery of projects falling within the scope of the programme. Some of the benefits identified from engaging a delivery partner are as follows:

- The partner will bring the additional capacity and highly specialist support and advice that the Council needs to deliver.
- Our current workforce will have an opportunity to gain experience from industry experts.
- BEST opportunities and benefits are achievable, and opportunities are maximised.
- New opportunities are identified.
- Combined council officer and delivery partner teams will have a strong mix of experienced professionals bringing both internal and external knowledge and experience.
- The procurement process will support the delivery of Social Value outcomes and ensure value for money.
- Opportunity to agree risk reward arrangement to incentivise Partner's performance, encourage innovation and increase risk transfer.

A Procurement Working Group was set up comprising senior officers with subject matter expertise (BEST Programme Director and BEST Workstream Leads) and led by the Head of Corporate Commissioning and Procurement.

A soft launch of BEST took place in April 2023 at multiple locations across the Council and the associate programme of work was mobilised and delivery started.

In September 2023, the procurement working group evaluated the tender submissions from the ITT and Deloitte were appointed as the Council's strategic delivery partner in October 2023. The introduction and mobilisation of Deloitte commenced on contract award, the contract is managed by the Executive Director of Transformation and Resources who is also the internal client relationship lead.

## **6. Progress Update Enabling Workstreams**

There are three enabling workstreams under the programme of work, these are as follows:

- Programme Management and Governance
- Communication and Engagement
- Benefits Realisation and Management

The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for on these workstreams is the Director of Transformation and Resources as the overall programme Executive sponsor and lead, supported by the Programme Director, Programme Manager, and subject matter experts.

Programme Management and Governance is fully set up and working effectively. The BEST Working Board, chaired by the Chief Executive and made up of the Executive Directors in their role as workstream SRO's and the Programme Director, meets monthly and gives strategic oversight and challenge. Beneath this there is an Operational Steering Group chaired by the Programme Director and made up of workstream leads and project managers which provides oversight of workstreams and manages the dependencies between them. Each Workstream then has a Workstream Board led by the relevant Executive Director as SRO and workstream lead, this Board provides direction and management for the overall workstream and is accountable for delivery of projects within that workstream, with the projects leads reporting into this board. Governance arrangements for the delivery partner contract are currently being developed, these will be led by the Executive Director of Transformation and Resources as SRO for the overall programme.

The soft launch for BEST took place in April 2023 and a communication and engagement plan was developed, this has included the set-up of a SharePoint site, recruitment and training of BEST ambassadors and regular newsletters to staff alongside Q&A style spotlights on workstreams and overall programme leadership. 87 ambassadors are currently engaged across all services within the Council. It has been recognised that a substantial proportion of current Ambassadors are County Hall based therefore further work is ongoing to engage staff in other locations across the county. Engagement with staff is fundamental to success and a key focus for all workstreams is on engaging as many staff as possible within the project work to propose, co-design and test ideas and solutions. At present this engagement has been at a relatively small scale due to the projects currently in delivery, however this will significantly increase as the larger projects are initiated and the expectation is that staff will be engaged in workshops, hackathon style events and larger scale Q&A's. A refreshed communication and engagement plan which will build upon on the work already done is being developed between now and Christmas with a planned launch in January. One element of this refreshed plan will be addressing what the new way of working means and how it impacts staff in their individual roles, services, and the Council as a whole.

It is critical that staff have the skills, tools, and knowledge to embark on the journey to new ways of working therefore an organisational development plan to support staff through the change is a key deliverable required within the Communications and Engagement workstream. This will include training and development and skills and knowledge transfer, focusing on sustainability for the longer term. An OD plan is being developed for the whole organisation, but work has already been ongoing

within workstreams for example the establishment of a Data Academy within Best Value for Money workstream and delivery of Living Leader within Best Talent and Opportunities.

Benefits (financial and non-financial) for each project within the workstreams are being collated, focusing on outcome and impact of the work and how these can be measured. Benefits tracking and management is area of expertise of the delivery partner, and they will be working alongside us to build upon this work over the next few months ensuring we have strong metrics in place for measuring outcomes, impact, and progress.

## 7. Progress Update Delivery Workstreams

Under each of the seven workstreams there are multiple projects, these projects have been categorized between those which can be delivered internally and those that require support from a delivery partner due to either capacity, expertise, scale, or a combination of these things.

Whilst the tender exercise has been ongoing the focus for the workstreams has been delivery of those internal projects which can be mobilised rapidly with little co-dependency on other areas or enabling projects for future larger scale work. Key deliverables and benefits to date include, but are not limited, to the following:

- OneCall and Enquiry Referral Coordinators (ERCs) live on Amazon Connect on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023, OneCall, Enquiry Referral Coordinators (ERC's) and Revenues & Benefits all use the same telephony platform. Integrating more services into the corporate contact centre will create capacity for service teams to deliver more complex work. It will enable a more joined up experience for customers that can have multiple queries across the organisation dealt with in the one place and create the data to support "a single view" of the customer.
- Fix My Street implemented by May 2023, a platform that allows residents to report public realm issues and get updates on progress. This system has improved the online offer for customers and has allowed better understanding and visibility of issues leading to more efficient service delivery.
- Modern.Gov implemented by September 2023, a platform to provide paperless management and publication of democratic papers and approvals. The benefits of this system are a streamlining to the process of publishing papers improving efficiency, improved governance and auditability of decision making and papers and stakeholders have access to modern technology that enable them to work effectively and securely.
- iCasework implemented by November 2023, a case management platform for corporate feedback and information governance request. This system allows more efficient case handling as all correspondence and documents are within one system and allows better insight into customer needs through the capture and analysis of feedback and use of this insight to provide a better customer experience.
- Procurement savings of £1.63m achieved in Q1/Q2 2023/24.
- Co-design of a future state model to divert referrals from ASC to community provision. Communities First development model to be presented to SLT Nov '23.

- Continued roll out of the living Leader Programme to staff as part of the Leadership Framework developing our people and establishing a common language for change.
- Depot Review completed in November 2023 with a number of recommendations to be implemented to improve and streamline our depot facilities.
- Planning, Performance and Accountability Framework developed establishing one corporate approach with a clear thread from corporate plan to service planning to individual appraisal.
- Data Academy proposal developed and launched with first cohort due to commence end of November 2023, this apprenticeship will equip staff across the organisation with the skills to support faster data- informed decisions.

Appendix 1 details the full progress of projects by workstream highlighting those which have been delivered or are inflight and those that require delivery partner support to develop and implement. As can be seen in the Appendix 1 there has been both a significant amount of critical design and development work for larger projects as well as a significant amount of delivery and improvement across the Council since the BEST launch and this will now be accelerated with the support of our strategic delivery partner.

In reference to the work to be supported by our strategic delivery partner, a 6-month work plan is being co-developed by council officers and delivery partner colleagues which will prioritise the work over this period. Proposed areas of focus are:

- Enablers – Development of Benefits Tracker and Updated Comms and Engagement Strategy
- Best Use of Resources – BEST ways of working development
- Best Service to Customers – customer journey development and customer strategy and access model
- Best in Class Commissioning – category management and commissioning framework
- Best Value for Money - Value for Money Assessments and service reviews
- Best Use of Assets - Estates Review and Plan

A number of ongoing activities linked to the Independent Review of Governance (2022) have been integrated into the BEST work programme, progress on these activities is reported through the relevant workstream highlight reports The Table below outlines the linkages and progress:

<b>Governance Review Recommendation *(including follow-up actions where relevant)</b>	<b>Proposed BEST Workstream</b>	<b>Update (29<sup>th</sup> September Group Leaders)</b>	<b>BEST (or other) Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)</b>
(10.2.9) Establish a scheme of performance appraisal, starting with the Chief Executive at Member level, in line with the JNC provisions, which cascades throughout the organisation so that	Best Value for Money	Work on the 'golden threading' from Corporate Plan to Performance Appraisal is ongoing. Currently, the focus of this is on Service Planning, with Directors and	Audrey Kingham

<p>every employee is clear about their targets and how they fit into plan delivery. As the Chief Executive is accountable to the Council as a whole for their performance, publish the targets and how they have been achieved as an annual statement to Council.</p>		<p>Heads of Service developing these based on a new approach and template. This forms part of the Planning, Performance and Accountability Framework under the Best Value for Money Workstream.</p>	
<p>(10.1) Establish what it means to be a Best Value Unitary Local Authority in its geographic area delivering appropriate services and community leadership to every resident and entity in its area.</p>	<p>Best Value for Money</p>	<p>Senior Officers have undertaken a Best Value 'baselining' exercise. This is based on the latest Best Value guidance.</p> <p>Through BEST, Officers are now developing a Value for Money assessment this will be piloted with by 3 or 4 service areas before full roll out across all council services. All council services will then have a baseline against which internal progress can be measured. Deep dives/ service reviews can be prioritised ensuring greatest impact.</p>	<p>Audrey Kingham</p>
<p>(10.2.1) Redraft its Corporate Plan in terms of the Administration's Goals and Objectives, moderated by the capacity of the organisation and the legislative framework</p>	<p>Best Value for Money</p>	<p>The Corporate Plan was adopted by Full Council in May 2023. The Corporate Plan is a key part of the Planning, Performance and Accountability Framework being adopted by the organisation.</p>	<p>Audrey Kingham</p>
<p>(10.2.2) Ensure the values by which it seeks to operate are lived within the organisation. <b>Follow-up actions: Develop a leadership development programme for the senior team to enable the team to be fit for</b></p>	<p>Best Talent &amp; Opportunities</p> <p>Best Enabling Workstream – Comms, Engagement and OD</p>	<p>T&amp;O workstream: - New values and behaviours have been launched and are now being embedded across the organisation - A service review has been carried out on coaching and mentoring offer</p>	

<p><b>purpose to meet the challenges ahead, including the need to speak truth to power and to support the whole Council with good member and officer engagement.</b></p> <p><b>Follow-up actions: Ensure that the whole Council are supported to be a part of the improvement journey.</b></p>		<p>- Leadership development continues through 'Living Leader,' alongside other initiatives.</p> <p>Comms, Engagement and OD</p> <p>-Comms And engagement strategy developed and implemented. This is now being refreshed and will be relaunched in January 2023</p> <p>- An OD plan is being developed to ensure that staff have the skills, tools, and knowledge to embark on the journey to new ways of working</p>	
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## 8. Implications

<b>Policy</b>	N/A
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	<p>Collectively, the Business Case for BEST agreed by Cabinet on 17 January 2023 sets out changes to ways of working that will deliver recurrent Council wide savings of more than £20m (Low: £17.9 million and High: £38.5 million). Savings will be incrementally achieved over the next 3 years, as and when change projects are delivered. Resourcing the programme is a critical enabler to mobilisation hence the key decision to tender and procure a Delivery Partner, this was essential to support the delivery of projects and to achieve the cashable and non-cashable benefits. Without the support of highly specialist change resources, many projects will not be delivered, and the savings opportunities set out in the Business Case cannot be met. The Budget 2022/23 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2022/26 which was approved by County Council in February 2022 provides for funding of £3m per annum for BEST implementation costs for the 3-year period from 2022/23 to 2024/25.</p>
<b>Legal</b>	<p>The Local Government Act 1999 imposes a duty for Local Authorities to make arrangements for the achievement of best value in the performance of their functions.</p> <p>Best value for these purposes is described as securing continuous improvement in the exercise of all functions undertaken by the authority, whether statutory or not, having</p>

	<p>regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.</p> <p>Within the design stages of workstream projects, regular assessment of any legal requirements / legal constraints will be identified, and advice taken where necessary. When needed, legal issues will be escalated to Programme Board and / Executive Team for strategic advisory and decision.</p> <p>The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council</p>
<b>Procurement</b>	<p>The procurement of the Delivery Partner was conducted in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and best practice methodologies.</p>
<b>Human resources</b>	<p>Within the design stages of workstream projects, regular assessment of any HR/OD requirements or constraints will be identified and advice taken where necessary. When needed, HR/OD issues will be escalated to Programme Board and / Executive Team for strategic advisory and decision. Regular updates are given to the Trade Unions on progress and future plans.</p> <p>The programme of work requires specialist HR resource to deliver projects which impact on staff. The Programme Team will be supported by HR Specialists and an OD Lead Officer.</p>
<b>Property</b>	<p>'Best Use of Assets' is a specific Workstream with key projects identified which will support a strategic review of the corporate estate and improvements to how the Council uses and manages properties within the corporate estate portfolio.</p> <p>The Strategic Delivery Partner will be expected to work on site at County Hall and potentially other corporate buildings on a regular basis. It is likely that hot desking space will be required to accommodate Delivery Partner colleagues.</p>
<b>The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?</b>	<p>No</p> <p>There are multiple projects for delivery within the programme r work and a key aim of the programme is 'no detriment to residents. This will be a key consideration for the design of each change project option and the anticipated equalities impact. Following the design phase of each project, an individual project Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) will be completed based on design options set out in an Options Appraisal for consideration and decision by workstream boards. EIA's will be subject to consultation with equalities specialist within the Council and will be subject to frequent review and update based on the chosen option</p>



<b>Risk assessment</b>	<p>A Programme Risk Register is in place with the identification of strategic risks and operational risks, and this is reported to BEST Working Board on a monthly basis. In addition to this all workstreams also have risk registers which are monitored via Workstream Board.</p> <p>BEST is identified as one of the Councils Corporate Risks and is monitored and reviewed regularly with the Corporate Risk team.</p>
<b>Crime and disorder</b>	N/A
<b>Customer considerations</b>	<p>Residents First and improving residents experience of services is a primary objective of BEST and 'Best Service to Customers' is a specific workstream in the programme of work. Key improvement projects identified for delivery, will focus on improvements to customer access, customer contact and engagement. Implementation of the projects set out in the workstream are also anticipated to achieve a reduction in the volume of customer complaints.</p>
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	<p>There are multiple projects within the programme of work therefore following the design phase of each project, an individual project Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA) will be completed based on design options set out in an Options Appraisal for consideration and decision by Workstream Boards. CIA's will be subject to consultation with the Council's Climate Change specialists and will be subject to frequent review and update based on the chosen option. Positive contributions to the Council's carbon reduction targets will be monitored and mitigation will be sought for any negative impacts identified as a result of changes.</p>
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	<p>BEST is intricately linked to work set out in the Inequalities Programme. The design options for each workstream project, will be viewed through the 'inequalities lens' to ensure cohesion of delivery priorities. Programme Leads will maintain regular contact to ensure that dependencies across programmes are known and understood</p>
<b>Wards</b>	(All Wards);

## 9. Background papers

Not Applicable

## 10. Links to other key reports already published

January 17<sup>th</sup> Cabinet Report – Strategic Business Case

[Appendix 1 corporate report template August 2019.doc \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

## **11. Author and Contact Details**

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