

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 18 January 2021

**Report author:** Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office

**Title:** Watford 2020 Programme Closure

## 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The council's Watford 2020 corporate transformation programme ended in March 2020. Whilst some elements of the programme had not been fully completed, council resource from March 2020 onwards was focused on providing the council's response to Covid-19. Since then, all outstanding elements have been subsumed into the business as usual or, in some cases such as the review of the Legal Service operating model, re-established as new projects.
- 1.2 In line with the council's project management framework, it is good practice to review the success of a programme through the development of a Closure Report which seeks not only to formally close the programme but also provide an opportunity to reflect on what went well and where lessons for the future can be learnt.
- 1.3 Appendix 1 of this document forms the full Watford 2020 Closure Report and provides an overview of the work undertaken, as well a review of the original objectives and anticipated benefits and the final financial analysis.

## 2.0 Risks

Programme risks were managed through the Watford 2020 programme and were reviewed on a monthly basis by the Watford 2020 Programme Board. Each constituent project also had its own specific risk register managed by the Project Manager and monitored by the designated Project Board. The majority of risks have now closed, following the conclusion of the programme. However, detailed below are risks that remain and the mitigating actions that have been put in place. Further details are provided within Appendix 1, including the Business as Usual risk owner.

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Firmstep processes with multiple integrations are not adequately supported in the Business as Usual environment	Impact on customer facing services and ability to resolve issues with the digital processes for customers. This could lead to a pressure on front office staff and a poor customer experience.	Watford 2020 programme created a permanent Digital Development Manager role and provided additional budget for Firmstep consultancy support	Treat	2 x 2 = 4
Changes to web content do not align with the content principles introduced through Watford 2020	No single voice across the council website and a poor customer journey for residents and businesses wishing to transact online with the council	Additional resource for Digital Development Team to manage web content and ensure ongoing alignment of principles	Treat	2 x 2 = 4
Outstanding tasks (outlined in section 6 of Appendix 1) are not completed	The consequences of this risk will be different depending on the activity. The outstanding tasks are fully detailed within Appendix 1.	Outstanding tasks clearly detailed and accepted through the approval of this report. BAU owners identified. To be monitored through EPMO Assurance Group	Treat	3 x 2 = 6

### 3.0 Recommendations

#### 3.1 That Cabinet:

- Note the lessons learnt and note the recommendations (as detailed within section 3 of Appendix 1)
- Note the formal closure of the programme

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### 4.0 Detailed Analysis

4.1 Appendix 1 provides an overview of the Watford 2020 programme structure, methodology and achievements. Addressing each of the programme tranches in turn, it identifies what worked well and where lessons could be learnt or what, in retrospect, could have been done differently. Section 5.0 below summarises the lessons learnt and some recommendations which will be recorded by the Enterprise Programme Management Office and recorded on the corporate Lessons Learnt Log.

## 5.0 Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

5.1 Based on the commentary and analysis in section 2 of Appendix 1, the following key lessons have been identified and are recommended for implementation either in the event of similar transformation programmes in the future or for programme / project management moving forwards. These lessons will be captured by the Enterprise Programme Management Office and retained within the council's corporate lessons learnt log:

- The need for strong and consistent leadership across the organisation to keep the momentum going – balancing the transformation work with business as usual or other project work meant that leaders were not always able to focus on championing and supporting teams and the Watford 2020 programme. The organisational development sessions for Extended Leadership Team were intended to support leaders to 'lead during period of uncertainty' but this was not always successfully achieved. There is clear value in giving leaders the opportunity to input into such a significant programme so that any concerns can be discussed and settled in private prior to ongoing public support. Whilst this was largely achieved at Strategic Leadership Team level, not all members of the Operational Leadership Team were as engaged. Moving forwards, the new Management Group should be used as an effective Forum to have these initial discussions and debates before agreeing on a way forward. The regularity of the Management Group also means that there is a continual opportunity to check in, which probably would have been useful during the Watford 2020 programme which relied instead on the quarterly Extended Leadership Team meetings.
- In line with the above, effective and long lasting culture change can only be delivered if there is a real focus, determination and vehicle to do so. In terms of flexible working and increased use of technology, Covid-19 achieved in a few short weeks what the programme had not yet completed. This was in part due to the fact that, prior to Covid, there was no 'burning platform' with plenty of room at the Town Hall and no perception of the need for change. In order to realise financial benefits, the detailed design work focused more on the redesign of process and to work out identified inefficiencies through using new technology and a better way of doing things. Whilst this, and the roll of new technology such as Unified Comms and Personal IT Kit, has underpinned the council's ability to continue to function during the Covid-19 lockdown, it did not alone bring about the culture change originally envisaged. It is recommended that a future programme has a designated work stream relating to culture and a cross-section of the organisation working on this, making use of council-wide groups such as the Staff Ambassadors. This will help to identify the culture the organisation desires but also provide an opportunity for any obstacles to be unpicked and buy-in from within the council and constituent services.
- The service resources needed in some areas were underestimated but could have been mitigated by a clearer corporate focus on the transformation programme as a priority. Further clarity of the corporate priorities and a stronger link between

the strategic direction of the organisation and the 'on-the-ground' delivery will help to manage Member expectations and associated resource. This has been provided by the Council Plan 2020-24 and associated Delivery Plan 2020-22 and it is important that this clearly flows through to individual Service Plans, rather than priorities becoming clouded by service-led projects with no clear link to the agreed Delivery Plan.

- The 'programme' approach worked well and the specific focus on benefits management should be established as part of the introduction of the Enterprise Programme Management Office and refreshed project management framework. This should specifically relate to the ongoing measurement and monitoring of benefits which was robustly undertaken in relation to the financial savings but less so for some of the non-financial benefits. This should form part of the 'Portfolios, Programmes and Projects' approach advocated by the Enterprise Programme Management Office. The use of the Programme Definition Document was extremely useful in confirming the scope and objectives of the programme and obtaining the initial permission for the programme to receive. It is recommended that Programme Definition Documents, along with other key templates used throughout the programme such as benefits profiles and programme reporting templates, are implemented as part of the introduction of the Enterprise Programme Management Office.
- The identification of a clear and succinct vision that could be regularly and simply communicated to all staff throughout the life of the programme worked well. Promoting this vision on posters, digital communications and within newsletters meant that the message stuck, as demonstrated by the staff survey results. A similar approach in the future is recommended.
- Consistency of approach is really important, especially when a programme spans so many different services and over such a significant period of time. The challenge is balancing this with the need for ownership by Service Leads and Managers, and the ability to amend the approach based on lessons learnt. However, where this was achieved, for example with a consistent briefing by Heads of Service on the Outline Business Case on the same date and at the same time across the organisation, this worked really well and represented a great corporate effort.
- Access to a designated programme team meant that the programme maintained momentum. It also meant that resources could be used flexibly to meet demand. Where a certain project within the programme required additional resources for a fixed period, the time of the team could be flexed to ensure that this matched the times that capacity was available within a service area. For the Enterprise Programme Management Office moving forward, the ability to be able to flex in this way will be crucial to ensure delivery of the Council Plan within existing resources, where possible.
- The significant lead-in time relating to recruitment needs to be built in to all future programmes and projects. This should cover not only the time the advert is out,

but also the time required to produce job descriptions, evaluate and moderate them as well as notice periods, any training required and the potential that the recruitment process will not be successful. In terms of project management, this has already been mitigated to some degree by the establishment of the Enterprise Programme Management Office and the employment of internal Project Managers.

- The agreed approach left some of the more challenging projects to the end of the programme. This included the final decision relating to business support, the 'Strategy' component of the operating model and the 'commissioning and performance' element. With motivation and momentum starting to fall after a two year programme, combined with the retirement of the Managing Director, it became very difficult to make any significant changes as part of the programme. There were operational reasons for developing the implementation plan in the way it was, but it would be beneficial in the future to really weigh up the benefits of accelerating some of the more significant and difficult changes. Many of these components, including our approach to strategy and the associated strategic pipeline, are now being addressed through the many internal changes and improvements introduced by the new Managing Director.
- The 'Enabling Projects' tranche of the programme allowed for many of the foundations to be put in place prior to the more significant corporate and service changes. Whilst this was a successful approach which ensured that the building blocks of the transformation were in place, the enabling projects tended not to be particularly visible or in themselves provide a huge amount of benefit directly to staff. Early on in the programme there was some frustration that there was lots of work going on but no direct benefits realised. To try and mitigate this, many of the enabling projects commenced before the other components of the programme were in place. However, it may have been useful to have had the Programme Communications Plan in place earlier; this proved a very successful document at other stages in the programme and may have allowed the corporate messaging to be consistent and clear on the enabling projects which may have addressed some of the concerns from staff.
- The Watford 2020 Pulse Group worked well. Feedback from the Group themselves was that they had valued the opportunity to input into the programme and the direct link with the Programme Manager. The fact that membership of the Group remained steady across the two years of the programme indicates that members found the sessions valuable. This group has now evolved into the Staff Ambassadors group which is a great legacy and the recommendation is that this continues to provide genuine two-way engagement with staff from across the organisation. The fact it is led by the Managing Director gives it additional credibility and it may have been beneficial for the Watford 2020 Pulse Group to have been attended by a member of the Strategic Leadership Team for the same reasons.
- The council was very ambitious in relation to the commercial ideas included within the Outline Business Case. Whilst a clear Strategy and Board governance helped

to drive this forward, the aspirational 'business-like' culture was not as firmly embedded as originally anticipated. With the creation of the council's new Commercial Strategy, it is recommended that there is a specific focus and delivery plan on the culture change needed and that this actively is carefully monitored.

- In line with the new Commercial Strategy, it is recommended that there is clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of Watford Borough Council and Watford Commercial Services, including the roles and responsibilities of officers who may have 'two hats' in Board meetings and making decisions. There were examples when considering the professional driver training business case when this was not necessarily clear. It is recommended that the Commercial Strategy also provides a clear decision on the commercialisation of services. Experience has shown that some services (Community Protection / Building Control) can successfully commercialise their existing services, but that this can take a lot of resource and a significant change in mindset / culture. If the council make a clear decision that it does not want to commercialise services then this should be made clear to all staff who have previously been encouraged to come up with ideas; if this message is not clear, it can be demotivating to staff and impact the culture. The council also has to be clear on the risk that it is willing to take. The newly developed commercialisation evaluation template will help to assess these opportunities.

## **6.0 Implications**

### **6.1 Financial**

6.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications in this report.

### **6.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

6.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that there are no legal implications in this report

## **7.0 Conclusion**

7.1 Watford 2020 was the first time that the council had attempted an organisation wide transformation programme and demonstrated that it could be achieved. Whilst there were challenges in delivering the net financial savings, the revenue budget of the council was reduced in 2020/21 by almost £900,000, increasing to more than £1m from 2021/22 onwards. Viewed in the context of an organisation with a revenue budget of £15m, that is a significant achievement. However, the programme's approach to ensuring a sustainable organisation meant that there was also investment in services when it was needed.

- 7.2 There was good political engagement throughout the programme and significant effort was put into ensuring that the programme was as transparent as possible with both Members and Staff. Whilst the length of the programme meant that momentum was a challenge and hindered the ability to progress some of the more radical changes, the programme has delivered a marked change in the way that the organisation operates, demonstrated clearly by the council's ability to react so quickly to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 7.3 The programme objectives were largely achieved and, in line with a programme of this nature, whilst some benefits have been realised others will be quantified and tracked over the coming years as the changes introduced by the programme are embedded.
- 7.4 The council is a changed organisation as a result of the Watford 2020 programme. With flexible working, significantly improved IT systems, more choices for our customers and financial efficiencies across the council, the programme has had a tangible impact and laid many of the foundations which will enable the council to build upon in delivering our ambitious new Council Plan in the coming months and years. This document details the recommendations for future programmes and projects and, as an organisation that is continually seeking to improve, it is important that the council acknowledges where things could be undertaken differently in the future. The recommendations outlined within this report will be retained in the council's corporate lessons log, maintained by the Enterprise Programme Management Office, to ensure that the organisation is able to benefit from these findings in the future.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Watford 2020 Closure Report