Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: 04 April 2019

Report Title: Review of progress on Open Data and Transparency in Cheshire East Council

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Paul Findlow

Senior Officer: Mark Taylor, Acting Executive Director, Corporate Services

1. Report Summary

1.1. Over the past few years, Cheshire East Council has made significant progress towards becoming a more open and transparent council. The cross-party Transparency Working Group (TWG), chaired by Councillor Findlow, was established in October 2015 and has met on a quarterly basis since this date. This report outlines the progress made and the next steps to be taken.

2. Recommendation/s

2.1. It is recommended that this Committee notes the progress made and the proposed next steps, and considers the opportunity to view the Open Data Portal at a future meeting.

3. Background

3.1. Transparency and Open Data can deliver multiple benefits for local authorities:

- Creating value for residents by providing information in new and accessible ways to help them make decisions about their lives and their communities. It helps them to hold councillors and council officers to account for their decisions and policies.

- Creating value for the Council by reducing the time spent providing data for different audiences, and by forming the basis of new applications and

website functionality. It can also provide a stronger evidence base for decisions and policies.

- Creating value for businesses, making data available in formats that they can re-use for economic and social benefits.

3.2.   Compliance with mandatory requirements

The TWG has focused on compliance with mandatory publication requirements and the technical solutions to support them. This includes compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, the Information Commissioner's Publication Scheme, Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2015 and various copyright and data licensing regulations.

3.3   Freedom of Information Disclosure Log

Cheshire East's FOI Disclosure Log was launched on 29th August 2018. The Disclosure Log publishes on the Council's website requests and responses handled under the Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR). It enables the Council to proactively make information released in response to individual requests available to the wider public; this reinforces the spirit of the FoIA and EIR, promotes openness and transparency and improves access to information which may be of interest to the wider community.

3.4   Case Management System

A new IT system (iCasework) for managing FOI/EIR/Data Protection requests has been implemented. This supports the publication of the Disclosure Log by automating much of the process. iCasework also allows powerful monitoring, management reporting and automation to help drive up compliance rates, and allows frequently requested information/trends to be easily identified.

3.5   Open Data Portal

'Open Data Cheshire East' is the Council's open data portal, and is used to publish the majority of our transparency and open data together in one place. It is designed to make inspecting, accessing and downloading the data easier for everyone, including developers, who may wish to use the data in their own applications or websites. This current site is due to be replaced by a new site which is due to be launched in April 2019. The

launch of this site will be supported by a full internal and external communications programme to promote it to officers, Members and the public.

3.6   Next Steps

The next steps are to:

- Create a Data Publication Plan to identify and prioritise which data should be published. The plan will be informed by FOI statistics/trends and our aim is to become more proactive, rather than reactive, in our disclosure of information. We have already had success in doing this in areas such as Business Rates, Public Health Funerals and Air Quality Data.

- Promote interaction and engagement with our open data, as this will allow developers to create products/applications of economic and/or social value. There are a number of other local authorities who currently do this successfully.

- Promote and embed across the Council a culture of commitment to transparency and openness.

- Disband the Transparency Working Group, in view of the progress made, and propose a future way of monitoring the Council's performance on open data and transparency, possibly through the provision of assurance to Audit & Governance Committee, with updates to Corporate Scrutiny.

4. Contact Information

4.1.   Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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