

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance and Resources
DATE	13 March 2024
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Business Charter for Aberdeen City Council
REPORT NUMBER	COM/24/068
DIRECTOR	Gale Beattie
INTERIM CHIEF OFFICER	Julie Wood
REPORT AUTHOR	Jim Johnstone
TERMS OF REFERENCE	2.1.2

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress made in relation to the Business Charter for Aberdeen City Council.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the progress made and lessons learnt in relation to the deployment of the Business Charter;
- 2.2 Agree to continue with the aims and principles as set out in the Business Charter as a basis for the continued interaction between the Council and the city's businesses;
- 2.3 Agree the virtual "cross services" working group established to support the delivery of the Union Street Empty Shops Grant should be used as the model for the future development and delivery of the Business Charter; and
- 2.4 Instructs the Chief Officer – City Development & Regeneration to report back, via a service update, on progress by May 2025.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

Background

- 3.1 At an Urgent Business Committee meeting in June 2020 approval was granted for the deployment of the Aberdeen City Council Business Charter ("The Charter"). The Charter was launched early in the Covid pandemic at a time of great uncertainty for businesses and set out how the Council would respond quickly to the needs of business as part of a wider socio-economic rescue plan.

- 3.2 The aims of the Charter were to ensure that Aberdeen remained an attractive place to do business and set “standards” by which the Council as a whole would support business through its business facing activities and roles (for example, economic development, planning, licensing, environmental health, trading standards, procurement etc).
- 3.3 It affirmed the intention to provide services to businesses that were fast and to the highest standards. As well as covering business facing services, it notes the value of the goods and services bought by the Council and how this spending power can support local businesses.
- 3.4 The Charter sets out the key principles for the Council’s interaction with businesses across the following areas:
- Planning & Infrastructure;
 - City Centre; and
 - Business Support

Review of Actions – Planning & Infrastructure

- 3.5 The Charter sets out three principles for this area as follows:
- *“We will provide a dedicated project manager for all pre-applications and applications who will coordinate across council services, ensure the accuracy and fairness of all advice given, consistently record the outcomes of all pre-applications, consider all factors affecting an application and advise if further work is needed prior to giving final advice”.*
 - *“We will seek to minimise the risks and uncertainties to businesses and developers in the planning process for complex proposals and major applications, through a development team made up of appropriate council services, which will ensure an integrated response to development proposals”.*
 - *“We will keep you informed of progress with your application so that no decision should take business by surprise”.*
- 3.6 Some examples of activities undertaken include the following:
- All applications and enquiries are allocated a case officer who ensure that the advice that they give is fair and accurate based on the information that they have in respect of material planning considerations and provide communication on progress of applications.
 - To support development proposals the team works closely with other council services to ensure that there is an integrated view of the proposal, a good example of this is the delivery of the Union Street Empty Shops Grant scheme which has drawn together staff from across relevant council services to support enquiries.

Review of Actions – City Centre

3.7 The Charter sets out three principles for this area as follows

- *“We will capitalise on the investments by the Council in the city’s tourism, culture and leisure sector, promoting the uniqueness of the city’s arts and culture offer”.*
- *“We will support, promote and encourage investment in business infrastructure, including property, housing, the city centre, roads, active travel and digital connectivity.”*
- *“We will help all business and investors find business premises by working with appropriate council services and Invest Aberdeen activity”*

3.8 Some examples of activities undertaken include the following:

- To support the Union Street Empty Shops Action Plan and join together the various ACC services leading on city-centre related policies, a virtual Union Street Cross-Service Working Group has been established. This will facilitate knowledge-sharing and enable a ‘bigger picture’ to be built of the situation on Union Street in terms of vacancy rates, property conditions, ongoing and planned works and developer interests.
- Invest Aberdeen has established a Regional Property Working Group with representatives with representatives from property agents and developers to ensure that we are aware of the availability of premises in the city.
- Through the Council’s external funding team, Council services are made aware of funding programmes that maybe of interest to their activities. In addition, via the Scottish Cities Alliance, the Council has been able to access a number of institutional investors and is at initial stages of exploring where there maybe areas of common interest, for example, energy transition.
- Through the Event 365 programme the Council and event partners have worked together to put on a variety of events in the city centre. These include, Spectra, attracting over 160,000 visits across four days, and Aberdeen’s Christmas events programme. The Council has staged major events such as the Tour of Britain in 2021 and 2022, and the European Pipe Band Championships in 2023. Finally, the council has been an active partner in Cruise Aberdeen encouraging cruise ship passengers to explore the city.

Review of Actions – Business Support

3.9 The Charter sets out six principles for this area as follows:

- We will ensure that local people are benefitting from the ambitious plans for our city by using our spending power in a tactical way, to prioritise economic recovery.
- We will provide advice to new businesses, with the support of Business Gateway, relating to the requirements of Environmental Health and Trading Standards legislation and support businesses through start-up, operation and expansion phases.

- We will continue to promote contract opportunities from all public sector spend to SMEs, including third sector organisations, through various events, which will be critical to economic recovery.
- We will support businesses to invest in Developing the Young Workforce by including training and community benefit clauses for major works, goods and services, by way of our purchasing power.
- We will endeavour to adhere to the principles set out in the construction Charter signed by the Council on 31 May 2018. The Council expects all construction contracts to achieve the highest standards in respect of employment status, health and safety, standards of work and training and understands the necessity of timely cashflow to our suppliers.
- We will endeavour to process all valid applications for licences as efficiently as possible and utilise delegated powers where legislation permits

3.10 Some examples of activities undertaken include the following:

- The Council is committed to ensuring that community benefit clauses are included in the major works, goods and services contracts. A dedicated project officer from the City Development and Regeneration Service supports contractors with the delivery of community benefits, identifying opportunities to deliver social value, such as work experience placements, apprenticeships and community timebank hours.
 - In the financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23 48 out of 51 regulated contracts included community benefit requirements. These included:
 - 931.5 hours of local community/third sector support
 - 226 jobs created (inc. apprenticeships)
 - 77 Work experience placements
 - 54 Environmental Wellbeing, Measures, Carbon Reduction, Fuel Poverty and Climate Literacy
- In 2022/23, through the Business Gateway Service the Council supported over 400 new businesses to begin trading the city and through it adviser team linked the businesses to relevant council services including licensing and trading standards.
- Advance publication of potential opportunities for contracts is published via Annual Procurement reports on the Aberdeen City Council website (two year forward plan), suppliers can also access the Council's contract register published on the website (updated monthly).
- To encourage local businesses to tender for council procurement opportunities we have held supplier information sessions and allocated a business adviser from the Business Gateway service to work with SMEs to develop their understanding and capacity and capabilities to tender for opportunities.

Lessons Learnt

3.11 These aims and principles as set out in the Business Charter, which were articulated in response to a period of economic crisis; provide the basis for the continued interaction between the Council and the city's businesses.

3.12 The positive comments from partners and businesses in respect of the virtual “cross services” working group established to support the delivery of the Union Street Empty Shops Grant suggests that this provides a model for the future development and delivery of the Business Charter

3.13 There are a number of public sector support organisations, for example Scottish Enterprise and, Skills Development Scotland that interact with businesses and the council should consider how we are able to join up with these partners to provide service offering that avoids the potential of confusing businesses in the city.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

7. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Failure to adopt the Business Charter will undermine confidence of the businesses in the city that the Council supports them.	The level of adoption and activities that are now “day to day “ practice are noted and monitored in the council’s service standard.	L	Yes
Compliance	No significant Risks Identified			N/A

Operational	Pressure on staff resources and availability reduces ability to meet the principles in the Charter.	The use of online and digital tools reduces the time requirements of staff	L	Yes
Financial	No significant risk identified			N/A
Reputational	Failure to deliver the Charter suggests that the Council do not support businesses.	Commitment to the Charter highlights the council's commitment and the link to service standards shows that it is being managed	L	Yes
Environment / Climate				Yes

8. OUTCOMES

<u>COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2023-2024</u>	
Impact of Report	
<p>Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement</p> <p><u>Working in Partnership for Aberdeen</u></p>	<p>The proposals in this report support the delivery of the Partnership's Policy Statement for a Prosperous City: Develop our economy in a genuine partnership with the private sector, third sector and residents.</p>
<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
<p>Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes</p>	<p>The proposals within this report support the delivery of LOIP a number of the stretch outcomes, but in particular numbers 1, 2 & 3.</p> <p>Through implementing the Business Charter, the council is expressing its willingness to support local businesses and seek ways to improve processes that allow businesses to meet their ambitions</p> <p>This will result in greater levels of employment and reduce levels of poverty.</p>

Regional and City Strategies	The proposal aligns with the Regional Economic Strategy in that it supports the development of businesses in key sectors and the development of an entrepreneurial region.
-------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	New Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not Required
Other	None

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 Socio-Economic Rescue Plan 2020/2021 (COM/20/98) – Urgent Business Committee 30 June 2020

11. APPENDICES

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Aberdeen City Council – Business Charter

12. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

Name	Jim Johnstone
Title	Service Manager – City Development
Email Address	jjjohnstone@aberdeencity.gov.uk
Tel	01224 053663