Executive Committee and Council only
Date signed off by the Monitoring Officer:
Date signed off by the Section 151 Officer:

Committee:	**Regeneration Scrutiny Committee**
Date of meeting:	**28th April 2021**
Report Subject:	**GovTech Catalyst Challenge**
Portfolio Holder:	**Cllr D. Davies, Deputy Leader & Executive Member for Regeneration and Economic Development**
Report Submitted by:	**Amy Taylor, Team Manager Regeneration Opportunities**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
x	x	13.04.21			28.04.21	x		

1. **Purpose of the Report**

1.1.   To provide Regeneration Scrutiny Committee with an update on progress of the GovTech Catalyst project.

2. **Scope and Background**

2.1.   GovTech Catalyst is a £20 million fund from Government Digital Service, UK Government to work with suppliers to solve public sector problems using innovative digital technology.

2.2.   The way in which GovTech Catalyst works is that the public sector proposes complex problems (or "challenges") and in the first phase they provided with funding to work with up to five suppliers for three months. If results are promising, up to two of those suppliers will be selected to proceed through to a second phase and continue to work on its development and testing for a year. This is all done with the aim of developing a solution that can be widely deployed to support challenges that are common throughout the public sector.

2.3.   The Council's Regeneration department put forward a number of project ideas to GovTech Catalyst team and in 2018, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC) was invited to form a collaboration to work on this with Durham County Council (DCC).

2.4.   The project entitled "Intelligent data to transform local council service delivery" in which both councils would work together to develop the challenge.

2.5.   In simple terms we wanted to see how existing assets such as Council vehicles could be utilised to support and improve how we deliver our services. BGCBC and DCC wanted to gather and analyse data from new sources such as information collected by residents or data captured using council vehicles. This data would then be used to improve delivery across the council services.

2.6.   The competition looked at two specific data gathering techniques in the local council service; "Boots on the ground" and "Eyes on the street".

2.7.   The project is being delivered in two phases, Phase One: Feasibility study and Phase Two: Research and Development contracts.

2.8.   Phase One: Feasibility study was awarded to demonstrate technical feasibility of the proposed solution. Five suppliers were chosen with a funding of £50,000 each to develop this phase over three months.

2.9.   During Phase One the suppliers identified the potential innovative technologies such as machine learning that could be used to deliver the objectives of the "eyes on the street" element of the Project. It also confirmed the types of data that could successfully be collected and how it could be used to form predictive models.

2.10.   The results of the "boots on the ground" data gathering were not as favourable and so it was decided that this would not be taken further into a second phase.

2.11.   Phase One did however confirm that detection of pot holes, road markings and road defects was possible. It also suggested that further development and training of the machine learning models would enable size and depth of defects to be established and mapped across the Borough.

2.12.   The results of Phase One showed that there are potential solutions to the original challenge and as a result of a gateway review with Government Digital Service, the project was given approval to move into Phase Two.

2.13.   Phase Two immediately followed this approval and the stage looked to award Research and Developments contracts to two suppliers from successful phase one applicants. This set up the next stage of the project for up to twelve months with £500,000 funding for each supplier. It was hoped that end results would be a prototype installation for wide scale deployment that can test functionality and reliability.

2.14.   Phase Two of the challenge commenced April 2020, however due to COVID-19 it was agreed at the beginning of the phase with the two suppliers that we would extend the twelve month deadline to fifteen months to ensure they were able to complete all work efficiently.

2.15.   Phase Two has focused upon deployment of the technology across the two areas of Blaenau Gwent and Durham. Technology has been installed on two vehicles used by frontline services including highways and refuse. This equipment will test whether data can be collected and whether it is of the required quality to enable the data to be used to inform service delivery.

2.16.   If successful in detecting defects and potholes, it is hoped that with machine learning it will be possible to develop predictive models to consider degradation of road condition and predict when intervention may be required. This will

support the service area to consider the business case of short term patching versus long term investment in repairing road surfaces.

2.17. Phase two will continue until the summer of 2021, and once this is complete we will be able to assess whether the technology is suitable for wider scale deployment across a greater number of vehicles and coverage across the borough.

3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1. There are no options to be considered as part of this report. Regeneration Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the progress of the project and further report on outcome of the project will be provided.

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council Corporate Plan Refresh 2020-2022

4.1. The project supports a number of the Corporate Plan Outcome Statements:

- Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities – by re-investing in highways maintenance including improvements to our residential roads, streets and pavements

- An ambitious and innovative council delivering the quality services we know matter to our communities – by developing a more commercial organisation to generate income and deliver cost reductions to make local services sustainable and raise money to re-invest in our priorities, a COVID 19 safe working environment for our staff and service users and seeking continuous improvement.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

Impact on Budget

5.1. Through GovTech Catalyst £250,000 was allocated for Phase 1 and up to £1 million was allocated for Phase 2. In Phase One five suppliers were each awarded £50,000 each to undertake their initial feasibility studies. In Phase Two, two suppliers have been selected to move forward into live deployment and testing and they will each receive up to £500,000.

5.2. There are no direct financial implications for the Council or our Partner Durham County Council (DCC). At the end of the project if there are any underspends these would need to be returned to UK Government.

5.3.	There is a risk that the solutions developed by the suppliers are not suitable for wide scale deployment. In this case there are no financial or resourcing implications. The Council could return to current methods of service delivery.

Legal

5.4.	The project has been procured as a pre-commercial procurement and the contract is based upon the Small Business Research Initiative. Blaenau Gwent has entered into this contract with the two suppliers and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been put in place between Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and Durham County Council.

5.5.	In order to ensure that the data collected through the project is managed correctly a Data Protection Impact Assessment has been prepared.

Human Resources

5.6.	Existing resources from within Regeneration are being utilised to manage the project and frontline staff including highways are supporting the project.

6.	**Supporting Evidence**

Performance Information and Data

6.1.	Collecting additional data around the current condition of our roads and potential defects will help the Council to better understand the key areas where there are issues and assist in future planning for investment. The data can be used to prioritise areas requiring intervention.

Expected outcome for the public

6.2.	Improving the way we deliver services to our residents will help improve the overall environment of Blaenau Gwent.

Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)

6.3.	Community Services have been consulted and participated throughout the project in its development. Staff in the service area have been working alongside the suppliers and have been testing the equipment that has been developed.

Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)

6.4.	Collecting data and having a greater understanding of the way our roads change over time in terms of condition and defects will allow improved forward planning to take place.

Collaboration / partnership working

6.5.   The Council is a joint challenge owner with Durham County Council so a collaborative / partnership approach has been taken throughout the Project. This has meant that both areas have opportunity to test and deploy the equipment and data collected by the suppliers.

Integration(across service areas)

6.6.   Work for the GovTech project covers a number of service areas and they have been involved throughout the Project. Considerable engagement has been taking place with the Community Services department.

7.   **Monitoring Arrangements**

7.1.   As part of the Project a number of gateway reviews have been undertaken with Government Digital Service. This has enabled the project to move through Phase 1 and into Phase 2.

Background Documents /Electronic Links
   N/A