

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 4 July 2017

Present: Councillor R Caserta (in the Chair)
Councillors T Cummings, M Hankey, J Harris, M James,
Leach, J Lewis, R Skillen, S Smith and S Wright

Also in attendance: Councillor Susan Southworth

Public Attendance: No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor E Fitzgerald and Councillor J Walker

OSC.45 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Wright declared a personal interest in any items relating to schools as his wife is employed at a Bury School.

OSC.46 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public in attendance to ask questions under this item.

OSC.47 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Harris being in attendance at the last meeting of the Committee, the Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 29 March 2017 be approved as a correct record.

OSC.48 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING OVERVIEW PROJECT GROUP - UPDATE

Councillor Susan Southworth, Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Overview Project Group attended the meeting to update the Committee on the work of the project group.

It was explained that the group had been established to review services available to Bury residents to ensure that those services were meeting the needs and requirements of their users and future users.

The group was made up of a number of Councillors who each had their own knowledge in relation to safeguarding from being ex police, teacher or school governors and working first hand in children's services.

During the 2016/2017 Municipal Year the group had undertaken the following work;

They had;

- Received the Ofsted report
- Met with social workers, both newly qualified and experienced.
- Considered work being carried out in relation to child sexual exploitation in particular the work undertaken by the Phoenix Team in relation to this.
- Reviewed the monitoring and examining of performance data.
- Reviewed elective home education across the borough and potential safeguarding issues around this.
- Looked at education achievement at KS2 and KS4, and
- Visited the Victoria Family Centre in Radcliffe

It was explained that should the group continue to meet it would require 2 new members. The group usually meets at 5 or 5.30pm so availability at these times would be essential.

Those present were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were raised:-

- Councillor James referred to elective home education and asked that confirmation be given that this area would be looked at again in the next Municipal Year. In particular what are the requirements for parents to notify the LA that their children are being home educated and what are the rights for the LA to inspect the level of education being provided.

Councillor Southworth explained that the local authority had very few powers in relation to elective home education but the group had met with the home education officer and had invited them to attend the first meeting of the group for 2017/2018. Most parents of those being home educated were very cooperative and more than happy for the local authority to visit and offer advice.

- Councillor Smith referred to the figures for home schooling rising nationally and children at risk of exclusion being home schooled to avoid this and asked whether this was adding to the numbers.

Councillor Southworth explained that a small number of children at risk of permanent exclusion had been taken out of school to be home schooled but there was also an issue with parents not being allocated their preferred schools and opting to home educate until a place became available. This could be seen by a spike in the numbers of home educated children in September and October.

Councillor Caserta referred to the Ofsted inspection that had taken place and the project groups' involvement in relation to any follow up work required and asked whether this would continue.

Councillor Southworth explained that if the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed the recommendations set out in the report then the group would continue to meet and would set out a plan for the work required for 2017/2018.

It was agreed:

1. That the work of the Overview Project Group be carried over into the new Municipal Year 2017/2018.

2. That, in order to retain the expertise and knowledge developed throughout the review, where possible the existing membership be retained and meeting dates be held quarterly and scheduled in advance.

3. That regular updates be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Group.

4. That the group in consultation with Klare Rufo Assistant Director Learning and Culture examine the feasibility of establishing a borough wide "Closing the Gap" group in respect of Educational Achievement.

OSC.49 REVENUE AND HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT OUTTURN 2016/2017

Steve Kenyon, Interim Executive Director of Resources and Regulation submitted a report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing.

The report provided Members with the details of:

- The revenue outturn figures in respect of the last financial year (2016/2017).
- Major variances between the revised estimate and the outturn;
- The level of school balances;
- HRA outturn for the year;
- The minimum level of balances in the light of risk assessments

Those present were given the opportunity to make comments and ask questions and the following points were raised:-

- Councillor James referred to schools' overspending and the requirement for them to repay the deficit to the DSG Control Account. Councillor James asked how schools' would be able to repay this if they didn't have the funds available?

Steve explained that it had been noted that the pressure on schools was now greater than their surpluses but the plan is to recover the deficit after 2 years. Steve suggested that there would have to be discussions into how this would be achieved.

- Councillor Harris referred to the number of children that were sent to out of borough placements at special schools and the cost implications that this had on the Council. Councillor Harris asked what could be done to rectify this situation.

Steve explained that the Council were working with clients earlier in order to prevent the need to send them out of borough.

- Councillor Smith referred to the capacity within the Council's SEN service with regards to places for 6th form students and asked whether the Council was any closer to agreeing a joint provision option with neighbouring local authorities.

Steve stated that he would pass on the issues raised to the Assistant Director (Learning & Culture).

- A member of the Committee referred to the one-off spend relating to ACS set out in Appendix 1 to the report. The spend was just short of £1.4m and it was asked what this related to.

Steve explained that this was in relation to the preparation work for the bid for the GM Transformation fund which was set up to enable integrating health and social care services across Greater Manchester.

- Councillor Wright referred to the academisation of schools and whether more schools becoming academies would affect schools' funding. What impact this would have in relation to Council finances.

Steve explained that the Council currently trades with schools in areas such as cleaning services, catering and grounds maintenance. The Council was working to retain these contracts to provide services.

- Councillor Harris asked about the disposal of assets and asked what happened when an asset was sold.

Steve explained that when an asset was sold the money realised from the sale had to be reinvested.

- Councillor Hankey asked why the figures in relation to fixed assets had fallen.

Steve explained that this was the valuation of stock which was a 5 yr rolling exercise where 20% of the Council stock was valued each year. The decrease in value that Councillor Hankey was referring to was in relation to the Council's housing stock.

- Councillor Caserta referred to the Council diversifying into property and asked for more information.

Steve reported that the Cabinet had given its approval for the Council to invest in property. It had been agreed that £10m could be invested and £8.5m had been invested to date. The Council had set out strict guidelines in relation to this and were currently receiving an annual yield of 6% on the properties that it had invested in. These included a car park and two city centre offices. It was also explained that the investments could be liquidated at any time.

It was agreed:

1. That the final outturn for 2016/17, and explanations for major variances (Appendix A, B and C) be noted;

2. That the recommendations of the Interim Executive Director of Resources & Regulation for the minimum level of balances in light of the review of the corporate risk assessments and departmental risk assessments (Section 4) be endorsed

OSC.50 TREASURY MANAGEMENT OUTTURN REPORT 2016/2017

Steve Kenyon, Interim Executive Director of Resources and Regulation submitted a report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing.

The report provided information on the Council's debt, borrowing, and investment activity for the financial year ending on 31st March 2017 in conformity with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management. The successful management of the Council's borrowing and investments is central to the Council's financial strategy, both in the short term and in ensuring a balanced debt profile over the next 25 to 60 years.

The overall strategy for 2016/17 was to finance capital expenditure by running down cash/investment balances and using shorter term borrowing rather than more expensive long term loans. The taking out of longer term loans (1 to 10 years) to finance capital spending would only then be considered if required by the Council's underlying cash flow needs.

Debt decreased slightly during the year, £195,682 million at 31st March 2017 compared to £196,011 million at 31st March 2016. The average borrowing rate rose slightly from 3.95% to 3.96%. Investments at 31 March 2017 stood at £18,550 million, compared to £22,600 million the previous year, the decrease being due to the use of cash/investment balances to repay maturing debt. The average rate of return on investments was 0.58% in 2016/17 compared to 0.71% in 2015/16.

Those present were given the opportunity to ask questions and make comments and the following points were raised:-

- Councillor Wright referred to the rates for borrowing that were set out in the report and asked whether this was APR.

Steve stated that this was not the case.

- Councillor Hankey asked that thanks to the Treasury Management Team from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be recorded for their hard work over the 2016/2017 financial year.

It was agreed:

That, in accordance with CIPFA's Code of Practice on Treasury Management, the report be noted.

OSC.51 CAPITAL OUTTURN REPORT 2016/2017

Steve Kenyon, Interim Executive Director of Resources and Regulation submitted a report from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing.

The report provided Members with details of:

- The capital outturn figures in respect of the last financial year 2016/17;
- Major variances between the Revised Estimate and the Outturn;

- The financing of the Capital Programme in 2016/17;
- Re-profile of budgets/allocations and slippage of funding into 2017/18;
- Details of the capital receipts realised during the year.

It was agreed:

1. That the final capital outturn for 2016/2017, and explanations for major variances be noted.
2. That the financing of the Capital Programme in 2016/17 be noted.
3. That the Committee consider and recommend for approval the re-profiled/slippage requests and associated funding into 2017/2018.
4. That the level of Capital Receipts realised in year and proposed use of the sites disposed of during the year be noted.

OSC.52 DEVELOPMENT OF A WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

Councillor Caserta asked those present to discuss what work the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should undertake for the 2017/2018 Municipal Year.

The Committee was scheduled to meet on the following dates:

7 September 2017
22 November 2017
9 January 2018
14 February 2018
10 April 2018

It was also explained that the committee could Call-in decisions if they felt it necessary and establish working/sub groups to carry out detailed pieces of work.

During the discussion the following topics were suggested:-

- Council owned parks and other leisure facilities being operated/looked after by other organisations and community groups such as the Forestry Commission or Friends' groups.
- Monitoring of air pollution/air quality across the borough
- Devolution
- Fly tipping
- Highways maintenance programme/cost of insurance claims re potholes

It had been agreed that the Safeguarding group would continue to meet.

It was agreed that:

The work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would include:-

- Air pollution/quality – monitoring
- Management of the Borough's parks and green spaces
- Highways maintenance programme
- LEA budgets
- Devolution

There will also be reports received in relation to financial matters of the Council, neighbourhood working and updates from the Sub Groups.

A forward plan will be produced in consultation with the Members which will set out the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2017/2018 Municipal Year.

COUNCILLOR R CASERTA
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.10 pm)