

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 23 March 2022

Present: Councillor R Bernstein (in the Chair)
Councillors N Boroda, L Dean, U Farooq, G McGill, K Peel,
M Powell, L Smith, D Vernon and C Walsh

Also in attendance: Councillor Rafiq, Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs and HR
Councillor Gold, Cabinet Member for Communities
Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive
Chris Woodhouse, Strategic Partnerships Manager
Jacqui Dennis, Director of Law & Democratic Services
Chloe Ashworth, Senior Scrutiny Officer

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor C Birchmore

OSC.1 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence are listed above.

OSC.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Peel declared an interest as he is a trustee of Citizen's Advice.

OSC.3 MINUTES

The following was raised, Page 9 of the minutes be changed to state Councillor Dean not Councillor Dene Vernon.

It was agreed:

1. The minutes of the meeting held on the 08th February 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

OSC.4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

OSC.5 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.6 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

OSC.7 CORPORATE PLAN (ANNUAL OUTCOMES)

Councillor Rafiq, Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs and HR provided an overview of the Corporate Plan and outcomes for the year 2022-2023.

The 2022/23 Corporate Plan is the second joint plan to be agreed by the Council and CCG to describe our commitment to the delivery of the Let's Do It! Strategy for Bury. This document summaries the progress made in 2021/22 and includes new priorities that have been agreed with Cabinet Members based on consultation with ward members, residents and other stakeholders.

Councillor Rafiq asked Overview and Scrutiny for their reflection of the progress to date against the Council's priorities, including delivery against the 3R's for 2021/22.

The Committee sought assurances on the Council's ability to deliver on all performance elements within the Plan. In response Councillor Rafiq confirmed he was confident all areas are being delivered on and robust monitoring of performance is taking place. Further questions regarding the Organisational Capacity to deliver on the Plan were asked. Councillor Rafiq stated the six-month review following the LGA Peer Review will shortly be taking place and will provide the assurance of the Organisations ability and capacity to deliver.

Questions regarding the Community Safety Plan and how this is planned for effectively when deadlines are known in advance was asked. In response Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive agreed that this will be investigated to see how it was represented in the previous year.

The Committee asked how Elected Members will continue to be engaged with on the plan and performance. In response Councillor Rafiq advised that feedback through the Community Hubs, Elected Members directly and through Scrutiny Committee's will be continued. In addition, Lynne Ridsdale confirmed that Priorities are now set for the year and Member engagement will continue with the quarterly delivery against the plan being reported on. On a day-to-day basis Members will be engaged on performance though portfolio meetings too.

Councillor Rafiq spoke of the key role the Performance and Finance Sub-Group Committee had in Scrutinising the detail of the Performance updates and keeping track of 'spotlight' areas of performance delivery.

Customer Care Standards and Digital Transformation was highlighted by a Member of the Committee as key and as an area of interest to the Committee to continue monitoring. The Committee were assured Customer Care Standards have been improved, work with officers has begun to take place to improve the work culture and behaviours and the transformation plan looks at proving digital offers where feasible.

Questions were asked about what practical behaviours will be necessary for driving culture changes. In response Lynne Ridsdale advised the detail is yet to be developed by an emerging piece of work but for a hypothetical example; the 'L' in the 'Let's Do It Strategy' stands for Local and the behaviour this may symbolise is decision making from a local basis; by not clustering in the Town Hall and working in the Communities when making decisions. The Corporate Plan provides a commitment to develop and refine a set of behaviours and the monitoring of this would be done through the Scrutiny Committee and the Performance and Finance Sub-Group.

A member of the Committee stated there is an improvement in sickness levels; but questioned how staff are monitored for being well enough to work. The last Performance and Sub-group demonstrated that short term sickness absence has improved and there has been a change in profile as people have been able to continue going when not feeling too well but well enough to work; in addition, there are set questions to check someone's wellness. Councillor Rafiq

added that there is an update to I Trent systems which will monitor sickness absence, the reasons, and the return-to-work processes in place.

Questions on departmental slippage took place; in response Lynne Ridsdale confirmed that the Finance Department is responsible for reporting the activity on delivery of savings, but the accountability lies with the relevant Executive Director of the Department.

A member of the Committee highlighted a point made within the report regarding the 'Councils fragile financial position' and referenced the reports that provided assurances on savings at the Budget Scrutiny Committee. In response Councillor Rafiq confirmed that savings previously outlined can be met. In addition, Lynne Ridsdale advised that we do plan to meet all budget savings this year and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy is clear that the long-term position is high risk for Bury.

Questions were asked regarding the statement on 'Decarbonisation of social housing, if a bid is successful'. In response Councillor Rafiq advised he would ask the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder for a response regarding the following points:

1. What bid is this?
2. Is this point connected with the 8.5 million decarbonisation money we received for the 14 public buildings that was due 2021/22.
3. Did we receive the 8.5 million and is it being spent on the decarbonisation of our public buildings.

It was proposed by Councillor Bernstein, that the Committee continues to manage performance reports in the same way in the next year and that the Performance and Finance and Sub-Group continue in the new municipal year. This recommendation was amended; It was put forward that a recommendation to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that a vote on the continuation of the Performance and Finance Sub-group take place.

It was agreed:

1. The Committee is happy with the report and indicators outlined.
2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee put forward a recommendation to the next meeting of the Committee that a vote on the continuation of the Performance and Finance Sub-group take place.

OSC.8 ANTI-POVERTY UPDATE

Councillor Gold, Cabinet Member for Communities provided an update on work relating to anti-poverty including the development of the Anti-poverty Strategy. Bury Council has significantly strengthened its focus on anti-poverty over the last 18 months. A more proactive and targeted approach has been taken to identifying and supporting households in need and financial crisis support was complemented with direct referrals for benefits assessment and help with financial management.

Councillor Peel commended the proactive approach taken to engage with people living in poverty who are not always engaged with the Council.

Following the Notice of Motion on Food Poverty the Committee sought assurance of the link between the Anti-Poverty Strategy and Food Strategy. Councillor Gold assured members that the Food Strategy is part of the Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Discussions took place regarding all the methods for engaging with residents through the Integrated Neighbourhood Hubs and the Revenue and Benefits Teams. The Committee were assured by Councillor Gold, Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive and Chris Woodhouse, Strategic Partnerships Manager that individuals are contacted and engaged with to support anti-poverty initiatives including the 'cost of living fund'.

Councillor Vernon questioned the details of how the £150 Council Tax Rebate will be applied to Council Tax bills. In response Councillor Gold advised that the target demographic are individuals who are on Universal Credit/support or in a Sixtown Housing property. Those on direct debit payments for Council Tax can have the money processed into their account.

Councillor Bernstein asked which GM Authorities are not real living wage employers. In response Councillor Gold advised that Bury, Salford, Oldham, Manchester and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) are real living wage accredited employers. In addition, Bolton, Rochdale, Stockport, Trafford, Tameside and Wigan are not living wage accredited but all but Wigan are seeking accreditation.

It was agreed:

1. The final strategy will be available in the first quarter of the new municipal year.
2. That Councillor Gold, Lynne Ridsdale and Chris Woodhouse be thanked for their attendance and update report.

OSC.9 URGENT BUSINESS

Councillor Bernstein thanked all officers who have supported members with agenda items throughout the municipal year, thanks to Jacqui Dennis, Chloe Ashworth and Julie Gallagher in Democratic Services for their support throughout the year.

Councillor Bernstein wished to also note his thanks to all Cabinet Members who have helped make a good and effective scrutiny process for this municipal year and all Committee Members for their attendance throughout the year.

COUNCILLOR R BERNSTEIN
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 10.00 pm)