

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 15 June 2022

Present: Councillor D Vernon (in the Chair)
Councillors R Bernstein, C Birchmore, A Arif, N Boroda,
N Jones and M Walsh

Also in attendance: Lynne Ridsdale, Deputy Chief Executive, Bury Council
Kate Waterhouse, Chief Information Officer, Bury Council
Jacqui Dennis, Monitoring Officer, Bury Council
Chris Woodhouse, Strategic Partnerships Manager
Julie Gallagher, Head of Democratic Services

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor N Bayley, Councillor D Green, Councillor K Peel
and Councillor T Pilkington

OSC.1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OSC.2 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd March 2022 be approved.

OSC.3 MATTERS ARISING

Members discussed the continuation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee sub groups.

It was moved by Councillor Vernon and seconded by Councillor Bernstein and it was agreed that:

A joint Finance and Performance sub group would be established an officer from Democratic Services would liaise with Members to confirm membership and future meeting dates.

OSC.4 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present.

OSC.5 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

Responding to a question from Councillor Rydeheard, Councillor Gold reported In relation to cost of living support provided by the Government includes the following:

The Chancellor announced a £150 payment to residents in properties within Council Tax bands A-D as well as a discretionary fund.

With respect to the discretionary element of this there are several cohorts within the higher bands that would benefit from a payment:

- In receipt of Council Tax Support – 226 @ £150 this equates to £33,900

- In receipt of a Disabled reduction – 122 @ £150 this equates to £18,300

The intention is for the remaining discretionary funding to top up the award of those households in receipt of Council Tax Support as they are known to have limited financial capacity; this will be across bands A-H and assist 13,360 households. Alongside a small balance to run an application-based scheme for those people falling outside of the identified groups e.g. residents of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). Details on this will be released later in June.

In addition, a number of further measures have been announced by the Chancellor but these are ones for which the Council does not have a role in allocation or distribution:

- A direct one-off cost of living payment of £650 for households on means-tested benefits. DWP will make the payment in two lump sums directly into claimants bank accounts – the first from July, the second in the autumn. Payments from HMRC for those on tax credits only will follow shortly afterwards.
- A pensioner cost of living payment of £300 for pensioner households will be paid in November alongside the Winter Fuel Payment
- A £150 disability cost of living payment to individuals in receipt of extra cost disability benefits will be paid directly by September.
- Households will receive a £400 discount on their energy bills in October 2022.

OSC.6 BURY CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE AND DELIVERY REPORT Q4 2021-22

Councillor Rafiq, Cabinet Member, Corporate Affairs and HR, attended the meeting and provided members with an overview of the Corporate Plan Performance and Delivery Report Quarter 4.

An accompanying report had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting and the following issues and comments were raised:

Responding to a question in relation to life expectancy in Radcliffe, Councillor Rafiq reported that the neighborhood profiles tell us that cancer and circulatory disease are the highest causes of mortality in the Radcliffe area. This is significantly worse than the Bury and England averages. The latest Index of Multiple Deprivation for Bury shows that this relationship between deprivation and ill health has become stronger in recent years. Tailored people and community plans for each neighborhood will drive the public service response based on particular needs for each area – this will tackle not only particular health conditions but also the wider determinants which will drive improvements in life expectancy and balance out the inequalities in the Borough.

Members discussed what is meant by the term ‘getting the basics right’. Councillor Rafiq reported that a ten-point action plan has been developed and although many of the actions in the plan are already included in larger programmes of work, they will benefit from being grouped together and focused on the overall challenge of getting the basics right. Actions include, improving internal processes, members casework and developing better ways of managing performance.

Responding to a Member’s question in relation to the effect of the pandemic on school attendance, Councillor Rafiq reported that

- Overall absence rates have increased in Autumn 21 compared to Autumn 19 across all school phases, with special schools and the PRU reporting the largest increase.
- Persistent absence rates have increased between Autumn 19 and Autumn 21 across all school phases except the PRU.
- All pupil groups have reported an increase in overall absence rates with EAL pupils at primary schools having the lowest increase at 0.9% and EHCP pupils at secondary schools having the greatest at 7.6%.
- Persistent absence rates have also increased across all pupil groups with EAL pupils at primary schools seeing the lowest rate increase of 3.8% and EHCP at secondary schools seeing the greatest increase of 22.2%.

Councillor Rafiq reported that for Quarter 4 2021-22 the breakdown for missed bin collections were as follows:

Blue bins - 49 Missed Bins per 100,000 Collections (12%)

Brown Bins – 84 Missed Bins per 100,000 Collections (31%)

Green Bins – 56 Missed Bins per 100,000 Collections (14%)

Grey – 87 Missed Bins per 100,000 Collections (22%)

Communal bins (all Colours) – 92 Missed Bins per 100,000 Collections (21%).

Members discussed the problems resulting from the pandemic in relation to rough sleepers and homelessness. Councillor Rafiq reported additional Government funding has meant the Council has been able to access funding to be able to increase accommodation options for this complex co-hort of people. In the last 3 years rough sleeper supported accommodation units have increased from 10 to 40.

There has been an increase in the number of residents in temporary accommodation; this is due to numerous factors and adds further pressures on homelessness services and the need to place more people and families into temporary accommodation. The other main factor is the lack of affordable, suitable and sustainable “move on” accommodation that is causing blockages which means people and families are having to stay in temporary accommodation longer than expected.

It was agreed

The content of the Quarter 4 performance report be noted and further quarterly reports will be considered at future meetings.

OSC.7 COST OF LIVING SUPPORT AND ANTI POVERTY STRATEGY

Councillor Richard Gold, Cabinet Member, Finance and Communities attended the meeting to present a draft version of the anti-poverty strategy. The report detailed the work undertaken to develop the strategy and provided information in relation to the immediate work required in terms of operational response to assist members of the public with the increases in the cost of living.

The report had been circulated to Members of the Committee in advance of the meeting and the following issues and queries were raised:

Members discussed the impact of the £150 Council Tax rebate scheme. Councillor Gold reported that although the additional government money is welcomed more work will be required to address longer term cost of living issues. This work will undertaken by the integrated neighbourhood teams.

Councillors discussed Greater Manchester Poverty Action Group “push” for Councils to adopt the Socio-Economic Duty Policy, Members expressed their support for its inclusion and adoption.

In response to a question from Councillor Jones, Councillor Gold reported that the report includes a number of key actions in relation to digital inclusion, including; review of the Bury offer, explore linkages with the digital poverty alliance as well as exploring opportunities for social enterprise development.

Members discussed support for the Borough self-employed, Councillor Gold reported, Bury has a larger than average number of micro-businesses. Nine out of ten businesses in Bury employ less than 9 people. There is a current challenge is that the rate of failed businesses is greater than that of new businesses – this may be as a direct result of covid given that Bury has a large construction and retail sector though other contributory factors given difficult trading conditions including inflation and Brexit related pressures. In essence residents travel outside the borough to access higher value employment opportunities.

Councillor Gold reported that for those residents that do not pay via direct debit they will receive their Council Tax rebate via Post Office vouchers, with 12,000 households to receive these (equivalent value of £2m) within the next week. The Strategic Partnership Manager reported that as of the 15th June 2022 the Council had made 48,000 payments totalling 7 million pounds.

Responding to a Member’s question in relation to the Armed Forces covenant Councillor Gold reported that since the refreshed Covenant was agreed, significant progress has been made in delivering on the Council and CCG’s commitment. This has included the roll-out of free leisure passes for military veterans, the development of a dedicated information hub on veterans support for GPs and support to Bury’s voluntary sector veterans groups. The Council’s progress in supporting veterans within the workforce was recognised through achievement of the Silver Award via the Ministry of Defence’s Defence Employer Recognition Scheme in May.

It was moved by Councillor Birchmore and seconded by Councillor Boroda and it was agreed, unanimously:

That prior to its consideration at the Cabinet Meeting on 13th July the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends that

- 1. the Cost of Living Support and Anti-poverty Strategy is amended to reference and incorporate the recently published Greater Manchester Poverty Action briefing (Briefing on the current scale of the socio-economic duty in England) and the Cabinet consider as part of its Anti-poverty strategy adopting voluntarily the Socio Economic Duty as detailed in Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010.**
- 2. The financial data contained with the report be updated.**

OSC.8 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKPLAN FOR 2022-2023

Members agreed the draft work programme for 2022.23, this will be a working document and Members are encouraged to forward any additional items for consideration to Democratic Services.

OSC.9 FOR INFORMATION ONLY - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TERMS OF REFERENCE

COUNCILLOR D VERNON
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at Time Not Specified and ended at Time Not Specified)