

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 9 January 2024

Present: Councillor D Vernon (in the Chair)
Councillors R Bernstein, C Birchmore, A Arif, N Bayley,
T Pilkington, G Marsden, E Moss, M Rubinstein, G Staples-
Jones and S Thorpe

Also in attendance: Councillor Gold, Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities
Kate Waterhouse, Director of Strategy and Transformation.
Jacqui Dennis, Director of Law and Democratic Services.
Jon Hobday, Director of Public Health.
Chris Brown, Head of Revenues and Benefits.
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 Boroda and Councillor D Green

OSC.9 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Birchmore declared a personal interest in all items under consideration due to her role as a volunteer at the Trinity Foodbank.

OSC.10 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.11 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

OSC.12 MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.13 ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

Councillor Gold Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities attended the meeting supported by Officers, to provide an update on the Council's Anti Poverty Strategy. An accompanying report had been circulated in advance of the meeting and provided details of:

1. DELIVERY OF THE PLAN
2. PILLAR ONE: TACKLING FOOD POVERTY
3. PILLAR TWO: WELLBEING AND POVERTY

4. PILLAR THREE: FINANCE AND DEBT
5. PILLAR FOUR: WORK AND WAGES
6. PILLAR FIVE: CHILDHOOD POVERTY
7. PILLAR SIX: HOUSING RELATED POVERTY INCLUDING FUEL POVERTY
8. ENABLERS AND RESOURCES
9. NEXT STEPS

In discussing the report the following issues and questions were raised:

Members discussed the increased use of food banks within the Borough. Councillor Gold, Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities reported that in relation firstly to the collation of data: this data was previously collated from May 2020 up until March 2023. The data was reliant on foodbanks / food pantries providing returns data returns with this information to the council with numbers supported. Despite working with the Bury Community Support Network to make the data return process as simple as possible and council staff spending a significant amount of time each month chasing numbers, the number of food banks consistently providing the data was very small and as such the reliability of the data was poor. As such a decision was to stop collecting this data and use qualitative updates to better understand the demand.

Bury Community Support Network and Bury VCFA work with the Council to ensure that foodbanks are not working in silos, work to support this, has included, invitations to cost of living summits, information, training and learning shared, as well as assistance in providing different advice and support services at foodbanks across the Borough.

The Cabinet Member reported that the council obtains qualitative feedback through the VCFA and the Bury Community Support Network on current needs and demands, this is fed back at the anti-poverty steering group. Local organisations are regularly made aware of and signposted to local and national opportunities for funding including the recent cost of living grants which have been paid out to 48 local organisations.

Members discussed the use of the Household Support Fund to support anti-poverty initiatives.

The Cabinet Member reported, where possible the Council have tried to encourage activities/one off support that engages those struggling to help them access all ongoing support they are entitled to promote longer term independence. The Council have also reinforced to local groups who have had funding to consider sustainability once their HSF funding is used up. The VCFA would continue to work with local groups to tap into national funding pots to support this where possible.

However, the impact will be a loss of just over £3 million. The Cabinet Member reported that although he would want to see the HSF monies continue beyond Easter as such some of the support such direct payments, cost of living grants, free school meal and holiday activity funds and CAB neighbourhood support would be unable to be continue at the same scale without the HSF, and alternative support opportunities would need to be explored.

Responding to a Member Question, the Director of Strategy and Transformation reported that the anti-poverty strategy cannot be seen in isolation and is part of a

larger suite of strategies including, the economic development strategy, the inclusive growth strategy and the all aged skills strategy all of which will help to address issues of poverty within the Borough.

Members discussed the Healthy Start Vouchers and although there has been an increase in uptake of the vouchers, whether more could be done to improve uptake. Responding the Director of Public Health reported that the vouchers are promoted via the DWP, Registrars, Bury market, food pantrys and also Primary Care. Bury has the highest take up of the vouchers within GM.

The Director of Public Health reported that there is very good evidence that a reduction in those living in poverty, leads to improved health inequalities, longer life expectancy and better health outcomes.

Members discussed the Software (Ascendant). The Software was purchased as part of this year's HSF allocation, is being utilised to identify and target residents who are either in acute need of support or indicating that they are beginning to struggle, thus enabling support to be directed to them through HSF and the wider Bury Welfare offer. Data sets identifying residents struggling to maintain their Council Tax payments for the first time have been pushed through the Ascendant product, who's software provides results demonstrating whether a resident is in hardship. This has resulted in 462 residents being contacted to advise them of the award – and potentially £415,800 in support being allocated via this method over the winter period.

The Cabinet Member in response to a Member question reported; the council uses the public service leadership teams to help identify older people who may be struggling through all front line staff whether it be housing, GM Fire and Rescue Service, GMP, social care, Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, the Staying Well Team or primary care.

It was agreed that:

1. The Cabinet Member and Officers be thanked for their attendance.
2. The Director of Public Health would share with Members details of where in the Borough, Healthy Start Vouchers can be used.

OSC.14 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee agreed that this item would be deferred to a future meeting.

It was agreed that:

Following consultation with the Leader, an additional meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held on 14th March 2024.

OSC.15 SIX TOWN HOUSING UPDATE

The Committee agreed that this item would be deferred to a future meeting, as detailed above.

COUNCILLOR D VERNON
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.05 pm and ended at 8.15 pm)