

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 24 July 2024

Present: Councillor D Vernon (in the Chair)
Councillors N Bayley, J Southworth, A Arif, R Bernstein,
C Birchmore, R Gold, G Marsden, E Moss, T Pilkington and
D Green

Also in attendance: Kate Waterhouse, Executive Director of Strategy and
Transformation, Neil Kissock, Director of Finance, Leader
Eamon O'Brien, Chloe Ashworth, Democratic Services, Haroon
Asghar, Policy Officer, Josh Ashworth, Democratic Services

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

OSC.1 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for the Meeting

Councillor Vernon welcomed Councillor Southworth and Councillor Gold as new members to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

OSC.2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OSC.3 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.4 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

OSC.5 MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.6 CORPORATE PARENTING CHAMPION

It was agreed:

1. Councillor Green be appointed as the Corporate Parenting Champion.

**OSC.7 YEAR END/QUARTER FOUR CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT
2023/24 AND SUBMISSION OF THE PRODUCTIVITY PLAN**

Councillor Vernon welcomed Councillor Thorpe to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in his new role as Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation. Councillor Thorpe, along with Kate Waterhouse, Executive Director of Strategy and Transformation, and Neil Kissock, Director of Finance, provided an overview of the Quarter Four Corporate Plan Performance Report for 2023/24 and the Productivity Plan submission. The report covered full-year performance, delivery monitoring for the Corporate Plan, updates on priority delivery, key performance indicators (KPIs), actions to carry over to the 2024/25 Corporate Plan, and the Productivity Plan for submission to central government in July.

Councillor Thorpe acknowledged his new role, emphasizing his intent to understand the Council's desired impact, align it with objectives, and challenge Cabinet colleagues on their portfolios. He noted the financial challenges faced by councils like Bury, which rely more on central government grants than council tax revenues and mentioned the new government's commitment to multi-year settlements and the "Let's Fix It Together" campaign, which aims to review council funding levels.

In response to a member's question about the lack of cross-referencing KPIs, Councillor Thorpe committed to including footnotes or references in future reports. He also mentioned plans for a more visual and precise presentation of KPIs in the 2024/25 reporting, linked closely to Corporate Plan priorities.

Addressing the decline in KPIs for the Council's top priorities compared to 2022, Councillor Thorpe highlighted the focus on improving school performance, attendance, and attainment for children on Free School Meals, supported by the Antipoverty Strategy. Regarding the decrease in business enterprises, he noted the decline reflects national trends due to COVID-19 and economic pressures. The local Economic Development Strategy aims to support town regeneration and promote business opportunities.

Responding to concerns about the time taken to process new benefit claims, Councillor Thorpe acknowledged the need for improvement and mentioned potential investments in new technology to automate processes and reduce pressure on teams. The cost-of-living crisis and the Household Support Fund have increased benefit demand.

Councillor Bernstein raised concerns about the corporate plan's partnerships in education. Kate Waterhouse emphasized shared values and accountability within partnerships through the "Let's Do It" outcomes framework. Councillor Birchmore questioned the effectiveness of investments in tackling mortality causes. Councillor Thorpe discussed the development of local neighbourhood profiles in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and targeted interventions such as smoking cessation and cancer screening programs.

Councillor Gold supported combining the finance and transformation portfolios and suggested additional scrutiny and training for councillors on Team Bury. Kate Waterhouse addressed homelessness, linking it to societal changes and the cost-of-living crisis. Councillor Green sought clarification on the housing waiting list and specific overcrowding cases. Councillor Bayley raised poverty issues, and Councillor Thorpe suggested these be addressed by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Pilkington discussed the need for agile planning in response to government changes and stressed being ambitious yet prudent to build trust. Addressing the decrease in Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) in Operations and Corporate Functions, Councillor Thorpe explained that increased staffing and investment in social care services were necessary due to a negative Ofsted judgement and to prepare for a CQC inspection. Reductions in other areas impacted capacity but were necessary to deliver £30M in savings over three years.

Councillor Pilkington celebrated community groups like Ramsbottom Civic Pride and their positive impact, encouraging engagement with local groups. The agenda item concluded with a discussion on member development group training and the potential inclusion of Team Bury at a future date.

It was agreed:

- 1 That the report be noted

- 2 The Member Development Group to consider a training session on understanding of Team Bury
- 3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee provide a suggestion for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider poverty impacts on Children and Young People.
- 4 Housing Sufficiency be discussed at housing subgroup

OSC.8 BUDGET UPDATE REPORT

Councillor Thorpe, Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation supported by Council colleagues, Kate Waterhouse, Executive Director Strategy and Transformation and Neil Kissock, Director of Finance provided an overview of the Budget Update Report. The report covered the following items:

- The 2023/24 revenue outturn position.
- An updated Medium-Term Financial Forecast (MTFF) position for 2024/25 to 2026/27.
- The updated Net Budget for 2024/25.
- The final reserves position as of 31 March 2024.
- The 2023/24 capital outturn position
- An update to members on the Finance Improvement Plan
- Sets out the work plan to close the budget gap

Neil Kissock, Executive Director of Finance, reported on the outturn position, indicating significant financial challenges in local government, particularly in children's services. He highlighted that these pressures are in line with national trends and are accounted for in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the 2024/25 budget. Despite a substantial budget gap, efforts are ongoing to explore cost-reduction options and reduce reliance on reserve funding. Addressing questions about finance and transformation, Neil Kissock explained that the September Cabinet update will review the first quarter's revenue and capital programme forecast outturn position. This review will restate the 2024/25 capital delivery programme to reflect slippage from 2023/24 and assess the deliverable scale of the programme for the current financial year. He noted that the slippage had resulted in a revenue underspend due to lower borrowing costs than forecast. The September Cabinet meeting will evaluate in-year performance, while the November meeting will update the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and outline budget proposals for 2025/26.

Councillor Thorpe emphasized the importance of prudent financial management and questioned resource allocation within the reconstructed portfolio. Council Leader Eamon O'Brien highlighted the need for balanced Cabinet roles, focusing on skills, interests, and current needs, and stressed that finance should drive corporate performance with clear, resource-driven strategies.

Councillor Pilkington discussed collaboration opportunities with other authorities on SEND and school transport. Council Leader Eamon O'Brien identified potential in public transport to meet demand, suggesting exploring public ownership of a bus company to provide reliable, cost-effective home-to-school transport. This issue will be raised at the network committee due to persistent overspending in SEND home-to-school transport.

Councillor Pilkington also mentioned challenges in transport arrangements and work patterns, particularly for hard-to-fill roles, suggesting improvements in home-to-school transport and expanding services to other public sectors.

Councillor Moss expressed concerns about the Children and Young People budget, noting the 2024/25 budget's assumption of one hundred and fifteen placements is unrealistic given the current one hundred and twenty-one placements. Members suggested reviewing the forecast for placements and potential overspend, with an update report to be included in the September Cabinet meeting.

In response to a question about the council's ledger update, it was noted that the current financial system is nearing the end of its life. A business case for a cloud-based ERP Finance Management System is being developed, expected to improve services and financial efficiencies. The proposed implementation timeframe is eighteen months, with a potential go-live date of 1 April 2026, subject to member approval.

Councillor Bayley raised concerns about the security of cloud-based systems compared to traditional methods. It was explained that cloud systems have security benefits, but on-site systems also have advantages if properly managed. Data security will be discussed further in the upcoming audit meeting.

Councillor Marsden inquired about intrusion parameters and responses, citing a recent system outage during a penetration test. The discussion acknowledged hacking risks and disruptions, emphasizing the need for robust security measures and addressing instances of cybercrime, such as email cloning.

It was agreed:

1. The report was clear and informative
2. To get the data regarding potential cyber threats
3. Interested on raising revenue and collection and where income streams coming from and dividends from airport to be included.

OSC.9 FORWARD PLANNER

Attached for information only.

OSC.10 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR D VERNON
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.53 pm)