

Minutes of: **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 1 April 2025

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: Councillor E O'Brien, Councillor Cummins, Rob Summerfield,
 Crispian Logue

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

Apologies for Absence: Paul Lakin Executive Director (Place)

OSC.36 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Paul Lakin Executive Director (Place)

OSC.37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declaration(s) of interest was made:

Councillor C Birchmore – relating to being a member of the Bury Folk Keep it Green, this related to the Local Plan agenda item

OSC.38 MINUTES

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 6th February 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.39 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions.

OSC.40 MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions.

OSC.41 DRAFT LOCAL PLAN (CONSULTATION DRAFT PLAN)

Councillor Eamon O'Brien Leader of the Council began by presenting an overview of the local plan, highlighting its significance in strategic planning and land allocation. He emphasized that this document is crucial for ensuring development happens in a structured and strategic manner. The local plan is designed to fill in the details around high-level strategic planning, focusing on how, where, and what development should occur.

One of the key aspects discussed was the consultation process. Councillor Vernon raised a question about the scope of the consultation and how responses are weighted. Councillor O'Brien explained that there would be an 8-week consultation period, during which feedback

would be balanced with national planning responsibilities. This feedback is essential for making adjustments before the plan moves to the second phase of consultation, which will be reviewed by the planning inspectorate.

Affordable housing was another significant topic. Councillor Birchmore expressed concerns about affordable housing being left until the end of developments. Cris Logue responded by explaining that Section 106 agreements would ensure affordable plots are identified and built throughout the development. Councillor O'Brien added that the average market absorption rate is around 50 units per year, which is typical for developments of this scale.

The discussion also touched on specific site issues, such as the Tetrosyl site. Councillor O'Brien mentioned that the planning inspector had overturned a decision, affecting the percentage of affordable housing. This led to a broader conversation about the suitability of converting properties into children's homes and ensuring these homes are in appropriate locations.

Infrastructure and developer accountability were key concerns. Councillor Vernon emphasized the importance of getting infrastructure in place before development starts. Councillor O'Brien assured that there are powers to hold developers accountable and enforce planning conditions. He mentioned that planning enforcement powers could be used to halt building if necessary, ensuring that infrastructure is built into the plan from the start. Community and leisure facilities were also discussed.

Councillor Southworth raised concerns about the lack of leisure facilities for children. Cris Logue explained that while there are no specific allocations for play areas, policies seek to secure community sums through Section 106 agreements. Councillor O'Brien added that an open space policy is being commissioned to assess local parks and spaces for children and young people.

Health impact assessments and the inclusion of neurodiversity groups in consultations were highlighted by Councillor Pilkington. Councillor O'Brien acknowledged the importance of ensuring these voices are heard and mentioned that adult social care is providing supported living for those who need it.

Finally, planning enforcement was a topic of concern. Councillor Green questioned the speed and effectiveness of planning enforcement in the past. Councillor O'Brien assured that resources are being put in place to deliver the plan effectively and address any issues swiftly.

It Was Agreed:

- The Report and update be Noted

OSC.42 REGENERATION UPDATE

Councillor O'Brien, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth, presenting the appendices and policy proposals. He provided a brief overview of the presentation and then invited Rob Summerfield, the Director of Regeneration, to give an update on the regeneration sites.

Rob Summerfield started by acknowledging the significant progress being made across various sites. He emphasized that there is a lot happening at different stages and places, and the Council is trying to adopt a place-based approach to regeneration. This approach aims to instil confidence that the projects will move forward effectively.

One of the key projects discussed was the Open Fund project, which received funding from central government. This project includes the Bury market canopy scheme, which is now on

site. The new market structures have made a significant visual impact, and the demolition of associated buildings is progressing well. The project is expected to be completed by the end of spring next year, with the flexible building next door planned to be an event and retail space by the third quarter of 2026.

Rob highlighted the challenges faced with utility companies, particularly in moving and redirecting utilities. He mentioned significant issues on both the Heywood and Radcliffe sites but noted that the Council has managed to address these problems effectively. The Radcliffe Hub Leisure Centre project, which includes a library and community facility, is well advanced. The frame is now complete, despite encountering an unidentified sewer that required quick action and lobbying by politicians to facilitate a build-over agreement.

The discussion then moved to the Millgate area development. The Council has a joint venture to develop the shopping centre, which is trading well above pre-pandemic levels. However, retail trends are changing, and the asset needs to be adjusted to fit modern retail uses. The strategic regeneration framework for the Millgate area was considered by members, and significant reconfiguration of retail elements is planned to ensure sustainability.

Another important project is the Pyramid Park housing development. The Council has secured grant money for site remediation and addressing biodiversity issues. Remediation work is scheduled for this year, followed by marketing for housing development next year. This project is key because it is adjacent to the interchange and must be developed in line with it.

Rob also mentioned various road improvement schemes funded through the city region central transport settlement and housing schemes discussed at the meeting. These include Green Street School and St E, with wider allocations for housing made through the regional spatial strategy. The Council has aspirations for employment at the Bradley Gold Asset Council homes, which is an old asset generating significant income.

The discussion then turned to the Council's corporate strategy and asset management. The regeneration mission is closely linked to the corporate strategy, and significant progress has been made over the last five years. The Council has implemented a corporate landlord model to manage assets and buildings effectively. This includes combining asset management and facilities management teams, implementing a corporate compliance regime, and investing in facilities and integrating systems like Concerto and Unit 4. Councillor O'Brien discussed the importance of integrating buses and trams and the need for frequent feeder buses from outlying parts. The Council is actively lobbying for additional services and changes to the existing network to improve accessibility for the elderly and disabled.

The Northern Gateway project was also a key topic of discussion. This project aims to attract advanced manufacturing companies and create employment opportunities. The Council is working on master planning, transport infrastructure, and utilities to unlock the site's full potential. The project is complex and long-term, but the Council is confident in its ability to deliver it successfully.

The meeting concluded with a discussion on the strategic direction of the regeneration projects and the importance of aligning various initiatives to achieve the Council's goals. Councillor O'Brien emphasized the need for continued collaboration and investment to ensure the successful delivery of the projects.

It Was Agreed:

- The update be noted

OSC.43 HOUSING 12 MONTH UPDATE

Councillor Cummins cabinet member for housing services began the meeting by providing an overview of the housing services transition back into the Council. She highlighted the establishment of the Housing Subcommittee and its role in the improvement programme and governance structures. He emphasized the momentum of delivery and the positive impact of the subcommittee.

Councillor Cummins discussed the improvement programme established over the last 12 months, focusing on culture and communications through workshops. He noted that the workforce has been highly engaged, which he found very encouraging. The mock inspection highlighted key areas for development and provided assurance on compliance, which has seen significant improvement. Collaboration with GMCA on homelessness was also mentioned, with positive outcomes and best practices being shared.

Councillor Cummins outlined the plans for the next three months, including repairs, assets, and property restructuring. He mentioned the development of a long-term housing IT plan, refreshing the first-year business plan, and agreeing on budgets. He acknowledged the valuable contributions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in providing challenges and familiarization with regulatory frameworks.

Councillor Cummins introduced the new director of Housing Sian Grant, who provided a brief introduction and shared initial observations. The Chief Housing Officer emphasized the need to improve key services delivered to tenants, particularly repairs and handling complaints. He acknowledged the challenges ahead but expressed confidence in the team's ability to address them.

A significant discussion revolved around the handling of anti-social behaviour. One councillor highlighted historical issues with reluctance to engage with tenants exhibiting ASB. The Chief Housing Officer acknowledged these issues and mentioned the implementation of new policies and external training for housing officers. He noted that recent court cases leading to evictions were a positive step in addressing ASB and restoring tenant confidence.

The need for better support from the police in dealing with ASB was discussed. Housing officers often felt exposed when dealing with such issues due to a lack of support from the police. The Chief Housing Officer mentioned ongoing training and one-to-one sessions with line managers to build housing officers' confidence.

Active listening to tenant feedback was emphasized as crucial. Various channels, including the Tenants First Story and the Housing Advisory Board, were mentioned as means of engagement. Successful clean-up events and estate improvements were noted as positive steps. Measuring tenant satisfaction at the point of service delivery was highlighted as a way to track improvements more accurately.

The difficulty in finding suitable candidates for key positions, such as heads of compliance and repairs, was acknowledged. The Chief Housing Officer mentioned ongoing recruitment efforts and the challenges faced in attracting the right talent.

The rise in disrepair claims was discussed, attributed to targeted efforts by repair companies. Measures to address record-keeping and recruitment of surveyors and tradespeople were outlined. The Chief Housing Officer emphasized the importance of ensuring tenants live in good standard accommodation.

The Chief Housing Officer outlined a comprehensive work plan and improvement plan for the next 12 months. He stressed the importance of honest conversations with tenants and

members to ensure transparency. He expressed optimism about achieving more good news stories and improvements in tenant services.

Councillor Cummins acknowledged the significant improvements made and the ongoing challenges. He committed to continued scrutiny and updates from the Housing Subcommittee. He expressed confidence in the direction of the housing services and the team's ability to maintain momentum.

It Was Agreed:

- The update be noted

OSC.44 HOUSING SUB GROUP UPDATE TO COMMITTEE

Councillor Vernon the chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee along with the Housing Subgroup gave a brief overview of the report from the housing Sub Group. Highlighting the work of the sub group helping to ensure collaboration between officers and councillors during the transition.

It was proposed that the committee continue having subgroups that meet at least once a quarter. These subgroups will focus on housing and performance aspects, with housing being the major focus but also including performance aspects. Councillor Vernon suggested that the composition of the two subgroups could differ, noting that the performance subgroup was active last time. Members interested in joining the performance subgroup should volunteer, and the subgroups are open to all committee members.

Dates for the subgroup meetings will be set and added to the calendar, with an emphasis on ensuring the meetings are productive and inclusive. The committee agreed to follow the plan going forward into the next year, focusing on areas such as housing, standard trainings, budget strategies, global operations, regeneration, and community safety plan updates. Members are encouraged to suggest additional topics for future meetings.

Councillor Vernon emphasized the importance of prioritizing attendance and participation, inviting members to join meetings even if they cannot attend all sessions. Action items include setting dates for subgroup meetings and adding them to the calendar, encouraging members to volunteer for subgroups, and suggesting topics for future meetings.

It Was agreed that

- To keep the sub group into next year with agreement to alternate between Housing and Performance
- Dates to be put into calendars quarterly alternating between Housing and Performance

OSC.45 FORWARD PLAN

There was a discussion around the forward plan, the Chair advised all members to advise if there is anything in particular they would like added to the forward planner for the next cycle of meetings.

OSC.46 URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

COUNCILLOR D VERNON
Chair

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