

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 13 October 2016

Present: Councillor Smith (in the Chair);
Councillors J Black; R Cathcart; T Cummings; E Fitzgerald;
M Hankey; M James; R Skillen; J Walker and R E Walker

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Lewis – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Human Resources

Apologies for absence: Councillors D Silbiger and S Wright

OSC.331 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R E Walker declared a personal interest in Minute OSC.336, Libraries Review Update, as a member of the Reinstate Bury Central Library Group.

Councillor Fitzgerald declared a personal interest in respect of Minute OSC.335, Corporate Financial Monitoring Report – April 2016 to June 2016, as a Non Executive Director of Persona.

OSC.332 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting, held on 31 August 2016, be agreed as a correct record.

OSC.333 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising from the Minutes of the last meeting.

OSC.334 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present at the meeting to ask questions under this item.

OSC.335 CORPORATE FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT –APRIL 2016 TO JUNE 2016

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member (Member for Finance for Finance and Housing) submitted a report to inform Cabinet of the Council's financial position for the period April 2016 to June 2016. The report also provided a projection on the estimated outturn at the end of 2016/2017.

Prudential Indicators were included in the report in accordance with the CIPFA Prudential Code.

Questions and comments were invited from Members of the Committee and the following issues were raised:

- In response to questions concerning the forecast overspend at month 3 of £6.395m set out in the report, the Deputy Leader reported that on current projections this figure had reduced to £5.5m. The Deputy Leader reported on the budget monitoring processes in place and referred to the 10 measures issued in August to reduce discretionary spending across the Council.
- Councillor R E Walker highlighted the increased costs relating to the statutory provision of social care. The Deputy Leader referred to the setting up of the Local Authority Trading Company, Persona, as means of controlling costs in this area.
- Councillor Black commented on the issue of unmet income targets and suggested that business models around this issue needed to be improved. The Deputy Leader acknowledged that some of the income targets appear unrealistic and explained that discussions were ongoing with Business Intelligence Officers who are Local Government specialists who work on a percentage achieved basis.
- Councillor Fitzgerald expressed concern about the lack of transitional funding and commented on the need for transition to start earlier to ensure potential savings are achieved. The Interim Executive Director of Resource and Regulation acknowledged that transformational changes often crossed budget years and needed to be monitored on a rolling basis.
- With regard to the sufficiency of current balances, the Interim Executive Director of Resource and Regulation commented that there was a strong balance sheet on the General Fund but highlighted that balances could only be used once.
- Councillor James expressed concerns about the likelihood of income targets being achievable. The Deputy Leader acknowledged that improved marketing, advertising and pricing structures were needed to make services competitive in the commercial market. The Chair, Councillor Smith, suggested possibly employing somebody as part of an invest to save initiative to improve marketing. Councillor Black suggested further discussions with partner organisations as a means of developing effective, targeted marketing campaigns.
- In response to a question from Councillor Hankey, concerning Treasury Management, the Interim Executive Director reported that as a result of low interest rates, the Council had diversified some investments from financial markets to property in order to achieve a greater yield.

It was agreed:

1. That the financial position of the Council as at 30 June 2016 be noted.
2. That consultations be undertaken with a view to this Committee having early sight of the Quarter 2 Corporate Financial Monitoring report.

OSC.336 LIBRARIES REVIEW – UPDATE

A report from the Cabinet Member (Strategic Housing and Support Services) was submitted providing the summary of the outcomes of the public consultation on the six principles as follows:

Principle 1

To provide a Library Service across the borough which provides all residents and those working or studying in the borough with access to libraries and to electronic services sufficient in number, range and quality to support reading for pleasure, lifelong learning, the development of new skills and the effective use of information.

Principle 2

To ensure that the needs of more vulnerable residents and groups protected by Equalities legislation are taken fully into account in the review process.

Principle 3

To ensure that the resources committed to the Library Service are used as efficiently as possible by exploring options to reduce running and maintenance costs and to share premises with Council and other services.

Principle 4

To explore options for investing in technology to improve access to the Library Service, for example by extending opening hours, increasing our digital offer and enhancing provision for those with sensory impairments.

Principle 5

To welcome the contribution that members of the community can make to the Library Service as volunteers, supporting both traditional and digital services.

Principle 6

To meet local aspirations for a network of community spaces across the borough in which the Council and local communities can work together as partners in meeting local needs.

The report also sought approval to proceed to the next stage of the consultation process using the six principles, alongside the commissioned reports, as a basis for a review of the library service. The consultation would take place during October to December 2016. A further report would be produced to identify potential models/ options for library provision in the future and would be submitted for consideration by Cabinet on 18 January 2017.

Questions and comments were invited from Members of the Committee and the following issues were raised:

- Councillor Cathcart stressed the importance of ensuring children's voices were included as part of the representative group and highlighted the importance of looking at library service models from across the country.

- Councillor Black highlighted the importance of targeting non users as part of the stakeholder group; examining the implications of digital technology; and looking to future proof the library service.
- Councillor James commented on the importance of public engagement and expressed concern that the review should not become solely about the protection of individual libraries.
- Councillor R E Walker referred to the reduced space within the Central Library and highlighted that it was the most visited and second biggest issuer of books of all libraries in the Borough.
- In response to a question from Councillor Hankey, the Assistant Director (Learning & Culture) explained that the questionnaire did not refer to potential closures in order not to pre-empt the review. It was reported that the next stage of review would examine the costs of the library service.

It was agreed:

That the report be noted.

OSC.337 ACADEMIES UPDATE

The Executive Director Children Young People and Culture provided a verbal update to the Committee in respect of Academies in the Borough. It was reported that Government plans to ensure that all schools become Academies by 2022 had been dropped with no "good" school now being forced to become an Academy.

As schools explore the possibility of becoming academies discussions continue on how the Local Authority can continue to work together. As things develop it will be important for the Authority to work collaboratively as a major stakeholder in education within the Borough.

With regard to funding, it was reported that school improvement will no longer be a role of the Local Authority and funding would be removed. Discussions on this issue were ongoing with Headteachers. The Authority will retain statutory duties in relation to Special Education Needs (SEN), school place planning, admissions and safeguarding.

It was agreed:

That the update be noted.

OSC.338 SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN OVERVIEW PROJECT GROUP

Minutes of the last meeting of the Safeguarding Overview Project Group, held on 15 September 2016, were submitted for information.

It was agreed:

That the Minutes be noted.

COUNCILLOR S SMITH
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7pm and ended at 8.25pm)