

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 14 December 2016

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

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

Councillor Walmsley – Cabinet Member for Strategic Housing and Support Services

Apologies for absence:

OSC.404 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Wright declared a personal interest in any matter relating to staffing as his wife is employed in a Bury School

OSC.405 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting, held on 13 October 2016, be agreed as a correct record.

OSC.406 MATTERS ARISING

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

OSC.407 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

OSC.408 CORPORATE FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT –APRIL 2016 TO SEPTEMBER 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 September 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 sustainability of services, the Deputy Leader reported that due to budget reductions it was inevitable that services would reduce as the Council looks to transform the way it delivers its services to the public.
- Councillor R E Walker highlighted the increased costs relating to the statutory provision of social care and enquired about the impact of Persona. The Deputy Leader referred to the setting up of the Local Authority Trading Company as means of controlling costs in this area and highlighted that savings from reduced costs would be achieved. However it was explained that upfront costs associated with the setting up of the organisation were an issue and a reason why savings had yet to filter through.
- The Chair, Councillor Smith, highlighted the issue of vacancies not being filled and the effect on services going forward. The Deputy Leader and Councillor Skillen, as Members of Human Resource and Appeals Panel, explained the thorough risk assessments that are undertaken as part of all applications for early retirement or voluntary severance.
- Councillor Fitzgerald expressed concern about the lack of transitional funding in comparison to other Local Authorities.
- Councillor Cathcart highlighted that Charities benefited from 100% rate relief in Bury and suggested this was an area that could be looked at as a means of generating revenue.
- Councillor Black raised the issue of enforcement in relation to parking in certain areas and suggested that increased enforcement would contribute to the service meeting its costs.
- Councillor R E Walker expressed concerns about missed income targets in relation to Civic Venues and suggested that private sector operators could be encouraged to run the service.
- In response to a question from Councillor R E Walker relating to the Arts budget and the income target, the Deputy Leader acknowledged that this was unlikely to be achieved and did need to be re-evaluated. On the issue of Arts exhibitions and initiatives, Councillor Black stated that the wider economic impact across the borough should be taken into account.

It was agreed:

That the financial position of the Council as at 30 September 2016 be noted.

OSC.409 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE 2016/2017 QUARTER 2

The Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member (Business Engagement and Regeneration) submitted a report providing an update on the corporate performance of the Council in line with the Single Outcomes Framework for Team Bury. The Single Outcomes Framework has been agreed with the Team Bury Wider Leadership Group with the following high level outcomes:

- All people of Bury live healthier, resilient lives and have ownership of their wellbeing (SOF-1);
- Bury people live in a clean and sustainable environment (SOF-2);
- People of Bury at all ages have high level and appropriate skills (SOF-3);
- All Bury people achieve a decent standard of living, and are provided with opportunities through growth (SOF-4); and
- Bury is a safe place to live, with all people protected (and feel protected) from harm (SOF-5).

Chris Woodhouse, Improvement Advisor, gave a brief overview of the performance information and invited questions and comments from the Committee. The following issues were raised:

- Members of the Committee welcomed the new format in which the performance data was presented.
- It was explained that the information was based on outcomes based reporting as a way of assessing the impact of funding and resources based on evidence
- Councillor Black highlighted the need to provide a breakdown of the indicator in respect of business rates in a way which gives context about the size and types of businesses and the level of business rates generated.
- Members discussed the use of the performance data as a means of potentially transferring resources within service areas based on how they are performing against benchmarks.
- Members suggested the incorporation of a cost/benefit analysis with the performance data.

It was agreed:

That the report be noted.

OSC.410 WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Strategic Housing and Support Services and Head of Customer Support and Collections presented a report setting out an update in respect of welfare reform policies and initiatives.

The report set out two groups of welfare reforms: those introduced during the 2010-2015 Parliament and those announced in the Budget in July 2015, which started to be introduced from April 2016.

Details of specific reforms were included within the report along with the associated cost implications. Currently there are 544 bedroom tax cases with 301 accounts in arrears owing £71,767.

Information was provided in respect of reforms, including:

- Introduction of Universal Credit
- Impact of Bedroom tax
- Council Tax Support Scheme
- Introduction of Personal Independence Payments
- Child Benefit Freeze
- Limits on Up rating Benefits
- Benefits Cap
- Housing Benefit Changes
- Tax Credit Allowance and Taper Cut
- New State Pension
- National Minimum Wage
- Rent Reductions for Social Tenants
- Removal of Automatic Entitlement to Housing Element of Universal Credit for 18-21 year olds

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

- Members discussed the resource implications to support claimants through the appeals process.
- Councillor J Walker highlighted the issues surrounding the introduction of Personal Independence Payments to replace Disability Living Allowance and the need for support in the appeals process. Claimants now face more frequent and stringent medical tests. Councillor J Walker enquired if provision could be made for claimants to have access to recording equipment for interviews.
- The Head of Customer Support and Collections confirmed that changes to welfare had resulted in increased demand on the Council's Contact Centre and a higher level of application to the Social Fund.
- With regard to the issue of debt and hardship, Members of the Committee highlighted the importance of early intervention and sign posting to support services. The Cabinet Member referred to the Corporate Debt Strategy and also highlighted the benefits of the Manchester Credit Union as a means of people managing their money.
- Councillor Black requested that future updates include case studies to highlight the real impact of cuts to welfare payments. Councillor Black placed on record her support for the way the support processes are managed for people facing devastating cuts to welfare payments.

It was agreed:

That a further update be provided to this committee in 6 months time which includes details of work done to support people to help gain employment.

COUNCILLOR S SMITH
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7pm and ended at 9.30pm)