

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 4 December 2013

Present: Councillor M Hankey(in the Chair);
Councillors D Cassidy; A J Cummings; J Daly; L Fitzwalter;
M James; P Heneghan; S Nuttall; D O’Hanlon and T Tariq

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

Also in attendance: Councillor J Smith– Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs

Apologies for absence:

OSC.xxx DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Heneghan, as a Deputy Cabinet Member, declared a personal and prejudicial interest in all matters relating to issues within the Children and Families portfolio

Councillor Tariq, as a Deputy Cabinet Member, declared a personal and prejudicial interest in all matters relating to issues within the Communities and Community Safety portfolio.

OSC.xxx PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

OSC.xxx MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting, held on 8 October 2013, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.xxx PLAN FOR CHANGE 3

The Committee received a presentation from the Deputy Leader of the Council, the Executive Director of Resources and the Assistant Director of Resources setting out details of revised financial savings requirements for 2014/2015 along with details of how the proposed savings will be met. The presentation provided a breakdown of internal savings that would contribute towards the additional £2.2m savings target for 2014/2015.

With regard to 2015/2016, the Executive Director outlined the scale of the challenge facing the Council that would mean £16m being cut from the budget. In planning for this it was explained that the aim would be to minimise the effect

on residents and employees but stressed that all options would need to be explored, including:

- Service Changes – closures and/or a reduced range of services
- Exploration of alternative ways of delivering services
- Increased waiting times and/or reduced quality of service
- Severe limits to what the Council can afford to do
- Reviewing how the Council is structured.

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

- In response to a question from Councillor Daly, concerning funding for the Citizen's Advice Bureau, Councillor Tariq explained that consultation on a proposed 10% funding cut from the Third Sector Commissioning Fund was currently underway. In addition, it was also explained that consultations were underway with organisations with regard to a similar 10% proposed cut from the Small Grants Fund. During discussion of this issue it was requested that the issue of how grants are allocated be considered at a future meeting.
- With regard to the issue of the use of volunteers, the Executive Director highlighted the current self management schemes in place and reported on the new arrangements within the Ranger Service. The importance of supporting volunteers to ensure continuation was stressed and reference was made to the current development of a Volunteering Strategy.
- In response to a question from Councillor O'Hanlon, the Deputy Leader acknowledged the importance of employee engagement and highlighted the importance of recognising the hard work of Council employees who have been required to take on extra work as a result of the budget cuts.
- Councillor Fitzwalter commented on the need for strategies to look at the issues of income generation and closer work with other authorities. The Deputy Leader explained that work was on going in these areas. With regard to the issue of shared services, the Executive Director explained that all options were being considered but previous considerations had offered no benefit to Bury as a result of the Authority's low unit costs.
- Councillor O'Hanlon expressed concerns that judgements on value for money and the efficiency of departments was made by the Executive Directors of those departments and suggested that such judgements were not necessarily objective. The Deputy Leader highlighted the rigorous and robust financial monitoring process undertaken through the Star Chambers whereby Executive Directors are held directly to account by Cabinet Members.
- In considering the potential for alternative service delivery models and more outsourced provision in the future, Members acknowledged the importance of effective contract management and holding providers to account through the scrutiny process.

It was agreed:

1. That the Deputy Leader of the Council, the Executive Director of Resources and the Assistant Director of Resources be thanked for their presentation.
2. That the Council's Medium term Financial Strategy be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee

OSC.xxx CORPORATE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT – QUARTER 2 2013-2014

The Leader of the Council submitted a report outlining the progress made on the Corporate Plan during quarter two (2013-2014) for the corporate performance indicators and projects within the Bury Council Corporate Plan.

It was reported that at the Cabinet meeting held on 27 November it had been agreed to reduce the frequency of the reporting of the Plan from quarterly to bi-annually.

Members of the Committee asked questions on a number of performance related issues within the report and an undertaking was given to provide further details in respect of the following:

- The action is being taken to manage the increase in proportion of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for the second or subsequent time.
- Staff turnover, including the number of leavers /number of employees and reasons for leaving the Council.

During discussion of this item it was requested that, when looking to revise the indicators at the end of the year, information relating to the pupil premium be included along the consistent use of cumulative and quarterly figures.

It was agreed:

That this Committee requests that the Corporate Plan continue to be reported on a quarterly basis to Overview and Scrutiny.

OSC.xxx CORPORATE FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT – APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2013

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs submitted a report which informed members of the Council's financial position for the period April to September 2013 and projected the likely outturn at the end of 2013/2014.

The report also included Prudential Indicators in accordance with CIPFA's Prudential Code.

During discussion of this item, the Assistant Director of Resources confirmed that the £400,000 increased dividend from the revaluation of Manchester Airport had been factored into future years budgets.

In response to a question from Councillor Daly it was explained that revenue from the increase in last year's Council tax had been allocated to fund the pay award;

finance the cost of agreed budget amendments; with any remainder being factored into the £2.2m savings requirement for 2014-2015.

It was agreed:

1. That the Council's financial position as at 30 September 2013 be noted.
2. That the s151 Officer's assessment of the minimum level of balances be noted.

OSC.xxx TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – MID YEAR REVIEW 2013/2014

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Affairs submitted a report prepared in compliance with CIPFA's Code of Practice to inform Cabinet members on the following areas:

- An economic update for the 2013/2014 financial year to 30 September 2013;
- A review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual;
- Investment Strategy;
- The Council's capital expenditure (prudential indicators);
- A review of the Council's investment portfolio for 2013/2014;
- A review of the Council's borrowing strategy for 2013/2014;
- A review of any debt rescheduling undertaken during 2013/2014;

In response to a question relating to the funding for lending scheme, the Assistant Director of Resources undertook to find out the detailed information and report back to Councillor Carter.

During discussion of this item, the Assistant Director took the opportunity to update the Committee on the processes in place as the Council look to source another bank due to the Co-op bank withdrawing from Local Authority banking.

It was agreed:

That the Treasury Management Team be congratulated on their good performance managing the investments of the Council.

COUNCILLOR M HANKEY
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7.00 pm and ended at 8.45pm)