

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 16 September 2020

Present: Councillor R Caserta (in the Chair)
Councillors T Cummings, R Gold, J Harris, M Powell, S Smith,
Susan Southworth, D.Vernon, R Walker and C Walsh

Also in attendance: L Jones, L Kitto, J Kramer, Cllr E O'Brien, L Ridsdale, M Rosenthal, Cllr T Tamoor, J Witkowski & C Woodhouse

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor K Leach and Councillor B Mortenson

OSC.202 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillor Karen Leach and Councillor Beth Mortenson.

OSC.203 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Gold and Councillor Walker declared an interest in item 6 as they sit on the Greater Manchester Transport Committee.

Councillor Walsh declared a personal interest in item 9 as she was employed in the education sector within a local school.

Councillor Stella Smith and Councillor Harris declared an interest in item 9 as they are governors at a local school.

OSC.204 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public present virtually to ask questions and no had been pre submitted to the committee under this item.

OSC.205 MINUTES

That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 14th July be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

OSC.206 COMBINED AUTHORITIES UPDATE

Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration presented a report giving the Overview and Scrutiny Committee an update on the activity of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and associated bodies.

The Combined Authority meets on a regular basis and the main focus had been on Covid recently, although there were other important pieces of work which can impact upon Bury.

Councillor Harris commented on the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework timescales and a timeline of dates in the autumn was reported which would enable scrutiny of the framework. Documents would be released prior to consultation of the strategy so residents can view the plans and engage with the Council.

Councillor Stella Smith commented on the GM Health Authority was there a vacancy for another representative from Bury to attend. It was reported that there was a vacancy and an update from the health and social care partnership could be updated at the health scrutiny committee.

Councillor Powell asked about homelessness and plans in place when hotels will not be offered at the end of the Covid support schemes. It was reported that there were more rough sleepers than previously thought and accommodation of 25 beds a night was currently available although this would be increased to 30.

Councillor Harris asked if the adult education budget had been increased and it was reported that it had been amended to enable it to do different things.

The Chair reported on the target figures for Wi-Fi and 5G across Greater Manchester and the Leader would confirm if the 25% figure quoted for fibre optic across GM was the ambition.

The Chair also enquired about the GM Clean Air Plan along with charges and it was reported that a congestion charge would only impact on certain commercial vehicles.

The Chair felt that more details should be provided on the Mayor's Cycling and Walking Challenge Fund and this could be discussed at a future meeting of the committee later in the year.

It was agreed:

That the committee noted the report and that further updates on the Combined Authority were provided to future meetings.

OSC.207 COVID RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Lesley Jones, Director of Public Health provided the committee with a presentation on the latest Covid response and recovery programme.

The Key Messages were provided to the committee on the shared position of the Council and Bury CCG.

The presentation provided the latest information on Covid-19 in Bury and what the data and intelligence was informing us.

There was a need for local action across Bury as cases were geographically spread across all 17 wards in the borough.

- Bury now had one of the highest coronavirus infection rates in England, falling within the top 20 areas. Rates of new confirmed cases of COVID-19

were rising in Bury along with other areas of Greater Manchester and other parts of England.

- Household transmission remains an important source of new infections as people spread the virus they caught in the community to their families. Those aged 18 – 39 account for around half of the new cases in Bury and the percentage of positive tests had also increased.

Other information reported to the committee included looking at the Bury and Greater Manchester coordinated response and what additional support does Bury require.

A sustained and coordinated action was required to address some of the challenges ahead in delivering Bury's action plan.

Councillor Gold questioned if annual flu vaccinations would be impacted upon this year due to Covid. It was reported that no problems had been identified although flu jabs would have to be conducted and administered in a Covid safe environment.

Councillor Walker commented on the hospital admission figures and it was reported that admission rates due to Covid were expected to rise significantly.

Councillor Walsh added of the long term health impacts of contracting Covid which certain age groups may not fully understand until full research had been analysed.

Members and senior officers commented on the hard work that staff had undertaken and the need to look out for stress and burnout within the second wave of Covid. Lynne Ridsdale provided information on support available to staff and the wellbeing packages in place.

Councillor Vernon asked if there was an impact on routine NHS surgeries and the Chair discussed when a vaccine may be available as until this was rolled out there could be further health risks of suicides linked to unemployment.

It was acknowledged that there are other risks unconnected to contracting Covid but were impacted upon because of the pandemic such as patients missing treatments and the impact on mental health.

It was agreed:

That the contents of the presentation and report be noted.

OSC.208 NEW BUDGET/FINANCIAL UPDATES AND AMENDMENTS DUE TO COVID

Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration presented a report outlining the key financial information and significant updates affecting the Council's financial position in 2020/21 and the impact on the Council's medium term financial strategy.

This year, the context in which financial planning was to be undertaken would be the most complex and difficult of recent times.

The significant financial impact of Covid cannot be underestimated and this was likely to be felt over the medium and longer term just as much as the shorter term. Government funding has been provided in the short term but any funding longer term was uncertain and the need to plan now for the future was ever more important.

The following scenarios had been calculated and regardless of the planning, there was significant inherent risk in any modelling particularly with the current economic uncertainties and anticipated changes in accounting rules for the collection fund.

- Optimistic – This assumes a minimal recession and a return to previous levels by April 2021.
- Mid-Range – This assumes a short lived recession lasting up to one year with a one-year gradual recovery;
- Pessimistic – Medium term recession lasting the whole of the 5 year MTFS period with some minimal recovery from year 3 onwards.

Councillor Walker stressed the need for continued funding in essential services such as street lighting and asked if the government would provide continued finance for capital schemes. It was stated that whilst savings would need to be made health and safety would still be a priority in relation to the impact on public services.

Councillor Vernon asked about the collection fund impact on the financial strategy and what plans are in place to improve the amount of business rates and council tax income. It was reported that this would be looked at later in the year and due to Covid it was anticipated to be 5% lower than the previous year. Letters offering support and relief arrangements would be sent out in relation to payment collections.

Lisa Kitto, Deputy Chief Finance Officer provided the committee with further financial details in relation to government grants and the anticipated reduction with council tax and business rates.

Members commented if further financial help would be received from the government and it as reported that further submissions were being worked on and the whole of Greater Manchester was compiling information to support further bids. It was hoped that by the end of November more information may be available to communicate.

Further discussions took place on the loss of council tax collection and the impact upon budgets.

The Chair drew attention to the 2021-22 budget setting timetable in the report and asked about the consideration of savings options and it was reported that this was in relation to potential service restructures.

Councillor Vernon reported that car parking charges had been reintroduced in Bury but the machines were not ready resulting in lost revenue. It was confirmed that was the case and a small financial loss would have occurred on those days.

It was agreed:

That the update be noted.

OSC.209 PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOLS

Councillor Tamoor Tariq, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Skills presented a report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work being undertaken on performance in schools as a response to Covid 19.

Before providing information on the report, Councillor Tariq passed on his and the committee's condolences to Head teacher Mr Ian Young who had suffered a family bereavement of his child earlier in the week.

The Covid 19 pandemic had resulted in a reset of the entire strategic programme for school improvement with all the associated safeguarding, intervention and Schools-led arrangements.

The planning framework from educational professionals would continue to change and evolve as the national and the local situation changes.

Information was provided on the Covid Catch-Up Grant of £2.4 million to schools and the National Tuition Scheme to aid with support.

Future items that Overview and Scrutiny may wish to consider could include:

- Attendance
- Performance monitoring
- Policy development
- future activity
- risk assessment

The report provided information on the school improvement agenda, distance and virtual learning along with a performance of Bury Schools in 2020.

The Chair commented on the recovery curriculum and other members of the committee raised concerns that they had not seen this document. Julien Kramer stated he would forward on a report (Recovering the Education System in Bury under Covid 19- Utilising HMI Expertise and Capacity) for other Members of the committee to view the information.

The Chair enquired about school inspections and it was reported that visits were not taking place during the autumn term to January 2021 due to covid and visitor rules in school.

Councillor Walsh talked about how primary and secondary school leaders were support the creating of online resources that teachers can readily access in a lockdown situation. It was reported that there was local expertise involved along with national support for distance learning online platforms. The Chair questioned

why this had not been worked on earlier in the year during the spring lockdown and had concerns about the consistency of resources across the authority.

Councillor Susan Southworth had visited a school in her role as a governor and felt that a review would be needed in a couple of months' time to see how protocols were working as schools had only been back since early September.

Councillor Walsh added on record that head teachers and the local authority were doing an amazing job and all the plans in place can change on a daily basis.

Councillor Walker asked about attendance figures and what percentage of pupils were receiving continuity of learning in schools as any cases meant a bubble or class may be off for 14 days.

The Chair asked about the government scheme to provide laptops to disadvantaged children and was the usage monitored. It was reported that around 850 laptops had been received in two batches and Bury was the first across Greater Manchester to distribute these. Julian Kramer added that no data was available at present and a new scheme had been made available and the Council would again be applying to obtain more IT equipment for children.

The Chair discussed results and the report attached to the agenda stated at this point figures for Bury were non-reportable. It was stated that there had been some discrepancies between school data and there had been a number of appeals.

The Chair asked did all schools in the borough open for children of key workers and it was reported that apart from one private school who had their own policies, the rest remained open until the summer holidays.

In summing up the report, the Covid 19 pandemic has presented significant challenges to the Council and its schools whilst school leaders should be applauded for the manner in which they have responded. Throughout the lockdown, schools have continued to support their pupils in many ways and endeavouring to minimise the impact on their learning.

The disruption to the lives of pupils, seen most in respect of examination and assessment, would have an impact and the focus of the current academic year was on re-setting the education system in Bury, and ensuring that schools support pupils in catching up for lost time.

Looking at examination outcomes and Ofsted judgements would continue to be important, but current context means the focus is very much on recovery and how the Council and its schools can work together to achieve this.

It was agreed:

That the update be noted.

OSC.210 BURY 2030 TIMELINE

The Deputy Chief Executive, Lynne Ridsdale provided the meeting with a verbal summary on the Bury 2030 strategy.

The 10 year plan was for the whole of the borough with the objective to work across the Council and other public service partners to create a team Bury.

Work had been undertaken to capture all voices for representation in the strategy and the Council would lead on the consultation aspect which included voluntary groups, community organisations and the faith sector.

The aims include improving life expectancy for the area along with economic growth.

The strategy had been delayed due to Covid work and documents would be compiled at the end of the month with public consultations to take place at the end of year with a launch for early 2021.

Member briefings would be held and views would be welcome.

It was agreed:

That the update be noted.

OSC.211 LGO ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER 2019- 2020

Janet Witkowski, Interim Monitoring Office and Council Solicitor presented a report setting out findings and recommendations of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The Council receives an Annual Report summarising all complaints dealt with by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

The Annual Review letter provided a summary of statistics on the Complaints and enquiries received made to the Local Government Ombudsman about the Council to the year ending 31 March 2020 and decisions made.

The letter and data was attached to the agenda as Appendix A. The number of complaints and enquiries received for this year as compared to last has increased slightly.

The complaints received by the Ombudsman about the Council in 2019/20 were split across services and detailed in as Appendix B of the report.

Appendix C to provided details of the six decisions upheld and the required actions by the Council to remedy these.

It was agreed:

That the contents of the report be noted.

OSC.212 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PLAN 2020-2021

Marie Rosenthal, Strategic Advisor reported on proposals for the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the year.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee needed to agree a balanced work programme which included pre decision scrutiny, policy development and review, investigative scrutiny, holding the executive to account, and performance monitoring.

The work programme needed to take account of relevant factors such as: the work programmes of the executive and other committees, strategic priorities and risks, audit and regulatory reports and recommendations, single-integrated plan and partners strategic priorities and relevant community issues.

A reworked work plan was set out at Appendix 1 and this was based on meetings the Chair had held with the Chair of Health Scrutiny and officers over the last few weeks.

Members provided various comments on the future of scrutiny and the proposed work plan along with the joint working with Health Scrutiny on the Covid 19 crisis.

It was agreed:

That the Chair would discuss future proposals with the Strategic Advisor.

OSC.213 URGENT BUSINESS

No other business was reported.

COUNCILLOR R CASERTA
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 6.30pm and ended at 9.20pm)