

Minutes of: **JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE FOR TEACHERS**

Date of Meeting: 7 February 2024

Present: Councillors G McGill, R Bernstein, D Berry, L McBriar, S Thorpe and D Duncalfe

Teachers Side – D Quayle (Chair), C Ainsley (NASUWT), J Burns (NASUWT), K Hopwood (NASUWT), H Chadwick (NAHT), Helena Thom (NEU), P Evans (NEU)

Also in attendance: Councillor Gold – Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities, Simon Bagley – Head of Human Resources, Paul Cooke – Strategic Lead (School System), Claire William – Interim Deputy Director of Finance, Kelly Barnett – Democratic Services

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

Apologies for Absence: Jeanette Richards – Executive Director of Children’s Services, Stephen Holden – Interim Director of Education and Skills

69 APOLOGIES OF ABSENCE

Apologies of absence are listed above.

70 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor McGill declared a personal interest in all matters under consideration in view of his wife holding a role as an NEU Trade Union representative in Rochdale.

71 THE COUNCIL'S REVENUE BUDGET AND THE MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

Councillor Gold, Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities provided an overview of The Council’s revenue budget and the medium-term financial strategy report provided within the agenda pack. Councillor Gold explained that the report sets out the Council’s 3-year financial plan and that the plan was completed before the government issued additional settlement monies of £1.7M. Councillor Gold advised of a budget gap in the financial year 2024/25 of £15.1M and in the financial year 2026/27 of £4.3M and explained that there was enough in the reserve monies to cover these gaps.

In relation to questions raised regarding the council tax increase, Councillor Gold reported that he is reluctant to raise council tax and reported that along with the council tax increase, Bury Council would also have to make savings to ensure a balanced budget. Councillor Gold highlighted that Bury is one of the worst funded Council’s (in the bottom 20%). A member highlighted that council tax makes up 45% of the budget and this income has been a significant part of the budget since 2010.

In relation to questions raised around the mitigations in place to protect Bury children and the education system, Councillor Gold explained that he has increased the Children's Services budget by 37% this financial year, to help with additional demands and make improvements. Councillor Gold highlighted areas where additional budget had been allocated which included SEN, school transport and fostering provision. Councillor Thorpe reported that the increase in the Children's Services budget has been due to extreme inflation, strengthening mental health services, recruiting more social workers to provide a consistent service and a response to a high demand of Education Health Care Plans. Councillor Thorpe thanked Councillor Gold and finance colleagues for being able to provide a balanced budget.

In relation to a question raised regarding Project Safety Valve, Councillor Gold reported that the Council has submitted a request to the DfE to consider an extension to the DSG management plan until the end of the financial year 2028/29, using £6M of Council monies to clear the deficit. The Council is waiting to hear if this proposal has been accepted.

In relation to a question around a S141 notice, Councillor Gold reported that Bury would not be submitting a S141 notice, as they have completed extensive work in relation to reserve monies, which means the budget can be balanced. Councillor Gold highlighted the work involved in balancing the budgets, which included an Independent Financial Improvement Panel.

In relation to a question around the impact of academisation on service level agreements delivered by the Council. Paul Cooke reported that there are a number of off-traded services that academy schools continue to buy, but other services for which they make their own arrangements. A review was currently being undertaken to assess the impact of an increasing number of Academy conversions on Council services.

In relation to questions raised around academy schools' finances, Councillor Gold reported that if an academy school was struggling financially, he would expect the academy trust to work with the DfE to find a solution. Paul Cooke explained that the Council has statutory duties in relation to the provision of places in the event of academy failure and would need to ensure that there are alternative arrangements in place for the children but highlighted that both maintained schools and Academy Trusts are facing financial challenges. Paul Cooke explained that whilst there is an opportunity for residential growth in the borough, the issue of falling roles is already being experienced by some schools, including academies, and this is impacting on their budgets. Paul Cooke explained that the Council does not have responsibility for funding to academies, but the Council does have an interest in ensuring that, as with maintained schools, academies are sustainable.

In relation to a question around opening new schools, when schools across the borough have falling rolls, Paul Cooke advised that the high school being developed in Radcliffe is a unique situation, as the Radcliffe area does not have its own secondary school and there is residential development taking place on brownfield sites in the Radcliffe area. There are also two special schools being developed which are required to meet the increasing demand for specialist SEN provision in Bury.

It was agreed:

1. The report be noted.

72 ANNUAL HOUSING REVENUE BUDGET REPORT 2024-2025

Councillor Gold provided an overview of the Annual Housing Revenue Budget Report 2024-25 provided within the agenda pack. Councillor Gold reported that the HRA budget is separate to the revenue account and that this budget is in a stable position.

It was agreed:

1. The report be noted.

73 URGENT BUSINESS

Paul Cooke, Strategic Lead (Schools System) provided an update on the risk assessment work being carried out in relation to violent students. The Inclusion Team is currently producing a model risk assessment template that will be agreed with professional associations and trade unions before being issued to schools.

**D Quayle
Chair**

(Note: The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.45 pm)