

**Minutes of:** CORPORATE JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

**Date of Meeting:** 7 February 2024

**Present:** Councillor T Rafiq (in the Chair)  
Councillors R Bernstein, C Birchmore, D Green, M Hayes,  
J Lancaster, E Moss, E O'Brien, A Quinn and R Gold

**Trade Union attendance:** A Beesley, E Entwistle, P Hewitt, K Mather, D Sharples and J Thomson

**Also in attendance:** S Bagley, P Braithwaite, J Dennis, P McKeivitt, S McVaigh, L Ridsdale and K Waterhouse

**Apologies for Absence:** S Allen

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### **36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Shirley Allen, who had to step down from the Committee. Members thanked Shirley for her tenure as both Vice Chair and Chair and sent good wishes to her.

### **37 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**It was agreed:**

That the minutes of the last meeting held 6 December 2023 be approved as a correct record.

### **38 MATTERS ARISING**

It was noted that:

- A special briefing for STH staff had taken place to provide assurance regarding Tax concerns;
- STH launch presentation was shared with Councillors;
- Future reports in relation to use of external expertise will include a start date; and
- Union Side officers to speak with Facilities Management outside of the meeting with regards to movement of staff from 6 Knowsley Place.

### **39 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET REPORT**

Paul McKeivitt, Interim Executive Director (Finance) presented the report which established the Housing Revenue Account budget for 2024/25. It proposed an increase in rent levels of 7.7% (which was the Government's maximum allowable increase being September CPI (Consumer Price Index) 6.7% plus 1%) with effect from 1st April 2024, an increase in shared ownership rents by 7.7%, and an increase for other charges and rents by 6.7% (in line with CPI as at September 2023). Members discussed the report, agreeing that any increase in rent would be a challenge for residents and a range of support mechanisms were in place for those who needed them.

Members noted that the report set out budget assumptions, including management costs being the same as the fee paid to Six Town Housing. In response to questions it was noted that the STH owned properties were not subject to Right To Buy and were outside the HRA.

Options for these properties would be reviewed in the coming months, but it was noted that this was a relatively small stock holding (104, compared with c. 7000 in the HRA).

With regards to STH governance, it was noted that a Board of Council Officers had been appointed who would ensure services to the properties and compliance with regulatory matters, and that a full review of all properties was being carried out. This Board would be overseen by the Housing Advisory Board, membership of which would include independent members, Councillors, and tenant representatives.

With regards to the rent increase for residents in social housing, Members clarified context that approximately one third of claimants would have their rent covered by housing benefit, though it was agreed that this context did not minimise their experiences.

**It was agreed:**

That the report be noted.

**40 THE COUNCIL'S REVENUE BUDGET AND THE MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY**

Councillor Richard Gold, Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities, presented the Council's 2024/25 budget proposals and the framework for the longer-term Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2024/2027. The report also set out the process that will lead to the agreement of the budget and the setting of the 2024/25 Council Tax at Full Council on the 21 February 2024. The full suite of documents presented also included:

- Council Tax Setting
- Capital strategy 2024/25 to 2026/27
- Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25
- The Dedicated Schools Grant and the schools' budget 2024/25

Councillor Gold spoke on the challenging times and the changes made in Bury over the last 12 months, including the work of the Financial Improvement Panel and the associated financial improvement plan. It was agreed that, long term, reserves could not be relied on but that the 3 year position was more positive.

It was noted that the Budget gap had reduced since December, from £17.243m to £15.131m (this took) account of approved savings of £5.368m). Work was underway to identify additional savings to deal with the further gap and, pending this, the gap will be funded through the use of reserves. Councillor Gold advised that c1.7m had also been announced from the government to help reduce the use of reserves.

An increase of 2.99% to Council Tax was being proposed along with a 2% adult social care precept, and the Medium Term Financial Plan reported a budget gap for 2025/26 of £10.627m and 2026/27 of £4.327m, bringing a cumulative three-year budget gap of £30.085m. Finally, Councillor Gold advised that the Real Living Wage was retained and the Union Side voiced their respect and thanks for this ongoing provision.

In response to questions, it was noted that premiums for unoccupied furnished properties (known commonly as second homes) would be implemented from 2025, after a consultation exercise. This wasn't anticipated to bring in much revenue for Bury, but it was noted that a firm and comprehensive strategy was in place addressing empty homes.

**It was agreed:**

That the report be noted.

**41 SIX TOWN HOUSING UPDATE**

Kate Waterhouse, Executive Director (Strategy & Transformation), gave a verbal update regarding the integration of Six Town Housing (STH) into the Council, which had formally taken place on 1 February 2024. This had been a 'lift and shift' arrangement, with STH staff sitting as one team within the Corporate Core reporting to the Interim Director of Housing Operations. This post was in place for 6 months to manage the integration of the team including the Operational Development programme underway.

In terms of governance, comprehensive arrangements were in place. The previous STH Board had been disestablished and the interim Chief Executive had left. The new Housing Advisory Board was being constituted to ensure all arrangements were in place before 1 April, after which time the Regulator for Social Housing could visit and inspect.

The improvement plan was still underway, with weekly updates being provided from the team, and a full stock survey would be completed by the end of March. In response to questions it was noted that this survey focussed on the properties themselves, but a wider programme of neighbourhood working and an integrated Council team was being mobilised to address known issues including the quality of environment on estates. Officers advised that Disabled Adaptations was another priority area to ensure properties were being utilised effectively for those with complex health needs.

Union Side reps reported that members on both sides had raised initial concerns, but that no issues had been raised since the formal integration. It was noted that responses had been positive so far, and Kate advised that work would continue to maintain this and deliver on staff expectations.

Councillor O'Brien advised that the new Housing Advisory Group would be chaired by Councillor Clare Cummins, the Cabinet Member for Housing Services. A programme of training and support for Board Members was being put together to ensure they were up to speed with new regulations and challenges faced, and this would benefit from meetings with Housing staff. He advised that social housing was an important part of what the Council did, and asked Union Members to maintain the dialogue with elected Members to ensure issues were being raised.

**It was agreed:**

That the update be noted.

**42 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 27 March 2024 at 5.00pm, but there was a possibility this might be rearranged.

**COUNCILLOR T RAFIQ**  
**Chair**

**(Note: The meeting started at 4.00 pm and ended at 4.45 pm)**