

GENERAL REPORT OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 JANUARY 2024

ADOPTION OF PUBLIC PROTECTION ENFORCEMENT POLICY

1. Councillor Alan Quinn, Cabinet Member for Environment, Climate Change and Operations, presented the report which outlined the updates needed to the enforcement policy within the Public Protection Service. Members discussed the level of discretion officers had in decision making under this policy, and noted that that Member involvement was welcomed but that the Cabinet Member strongly trusted officer recommendations in these matters.
2. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIRECTORATE - SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

3. Councillor Lucy Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, presented the report which sought Cabinet approval to progress to formal consultation with affected staff on the restructure of the Children & Young People's Directorate Management structure. Members welcomed this report and it was noted that the intention was for the creation of the Director of Social Care & Early Help post to be expedited to Council for approval.
4. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.

STRATEGIC HOUSING REVIEW - MANAGEMENT OF HOUSING STOCK

5. Councillor Eamonn O'Brien presented the report on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, which provided Members with an overview of the activity that has taken place since November with regards to the transfer of the management and maintenance of Council housing to direct control by the local authority. He thanked Councillor Cummins and the team of officers across Six Town Housing, the STH Board, as well as Cath Farrell in particular, for the hard work and decision making throughout this process.
6. In response to Members' questions it was noted that the new Director of Housing post would be interim for the time being but the intention for this was to be a permanent position. With regards to keeping the Six Town Housing name, this was to retain the properties owned by the company and the brand would be phased out appropriately in order to manage associated costs. Members welcomed the role of Scrutiny moving forwards, ensuring greater Member involvement and oversight of matters.
7. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.

PROPOSAL TO UTILISE A DYNAMIC PURCHASING SYSTEM FOR DISABLED ADAPTATIONS

8. Councillor Eamonn O'Brien presented the report on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Housing Services, which outlined the proposal to utilise a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) delivered by Independence Community Interest Company (INCIC) for disabled adaptations. This was an important service and the DPS would help prevent bottlenecks and delays, securing specialist workers where appropriate and providing a better service to residents.
9. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.

APPOINTMENTS UPDATE

12. Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth, presented the report which set out changes to appointments since the Council meeting in May 2023 regarding Councillor Boroda's appointment as Cabinet Member and associated Committee and Outside Body positions.
13. Cabinet noted the appointments.

GENERAL REPORT OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 FEBRUARY 2024

HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET REPORT

14. Councillor Richard Gold, Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities, 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). It was noted that this report had been considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as Union meetings.
15. In response to questions it was noted that hardship funds were in place to support tenants on housing benefits and universal credit. These differed based on whether funds were paid to the tenant or the landlord, and the Council was working with tenants to help them according to their circumstances.
16. Cabinet commended the recommendations to Council.

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

17. 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.
18. 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
19. It was noted that this had been considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as Union meetings.
20. 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.
21. Councillor Gold advised that a recommendation regarding the treatment of military compensation was in response to the British Legion campaign, but also added discretionary housing support in addition to their proposals.

22. Members noted 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 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, which had not been in time to be included in these papers but would be reflected in Quarter 1 reports.
23. Members discussed the core spending power of the Council noting that although it was very slightly higher than the national average, Bury had been in the lowest 20% for funding and had received 17% increase in demand as well as £11m inflationary costs, which outstripped spending power. With regards to previous savings targets, 93% of these had been achieved and a plan to substantially reduce the remaining 7% would be received in Quarter 1. Officers advised that once previous savings targets had been delivered, work in Children's Services would continue to address budget concerns before work on the Council's balance sheet would begin to release assets where possible.
24. Cabinet commended the recommendations to Council.

QUARTER THREE CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023/24

25. Councillor Tahir Rafiq, Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs and HR, presented the performance and delivery monitoring report for Quarter Three against the Corporate Plan for 2023/24. It contained full updates in terms of both the delivery against the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and associated key performance indicators. A RAG rating and percentage completion had been introduced against each objective, and Members thanked officers for the improvement in these reports.
26. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.

REPORT BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (21 011 785 / 23 005 479 / 22 011 825)

27. Councillor Lucy Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, presented the report which set out the findings by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) made against the Council following the Council's failure to comply with agreed recommendations following two earlier investigations, and the action now taken by the Council to demonstrate that it has complied with those recommendations. Members noted that this complaint related to the Council's failure to provide appropriate free transport and repeated failure to remedy the situation within agreed timescales.
28. In response to questions relating to this item and the subsequent item, Councillor Lucy Smith gave assurances that these related to historic complaints and since this time stronger policies and processes had been introduced which clarified staffing leads. It was also noted that the Monitoring Officer was meeting on a three-monthly basis with the LGO which would ensure issues like this would not reoccur.
29. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report

REPORT BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (23 006 024)

30. Councillor Lucy Smith, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, presented the report which set out the findings by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) made against the Council following the Council's failure to comply with agreed recommendations following an earlier LGO investigation, and the action now taken by the Council to demonstrate that it has complied with those recommendations. Members noted that this complaint related to the Council failing to act properly when a child was out of education causing injustice, and the subsequent remedy not being carried out in agreed timescales.
31. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.

SIMISTER ISLAND DEVELOPMENT CONSENT ORDER

32. *Councillor Charlotte Morris declared an interest in this item and did not participate in the discussion or vote on the decision.*
33. Councillor Eamonn O'Brien, Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth, presented the report which detailed a National Highways scheme to undertake a major infrastructure development to improve Junction 18 of the M60 (Simister Island) and widen to five lanes of the M60 between Junction 17 and Junction 18 to facilitate smoother flows of traffic along the connecting motorways. This was a "Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project" (NSIP) which meant that planning consent for the scheme is determined by the Secretary of State through an application process known as a Development Consent Order (DCO). Members noted that the Council will not decide whether the scheme goes ahead but will automatically be an "Interested Party" and was required to provide evidence within prescribed timetables and, as such, the report recommended appropriate delegations to facilitate this.
34. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.

BURY COUNCIL FINANCE - FUTURE LEADERSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

35. Councillor Richard Gold, Cabinet Member for Finance and Communities, presented the report which set out proposals in relation to the future substantive leadership of the Council's Finance function. Members noted it would strengthen the structure of senior finance officers whilst maintaining relevant expertise and ensuring subject matter experts were in place. Proposals had been market tested and similar structures were in place at other Councils. Members discussed the proposals and noted the cross-party support.
36. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.

APPOINTMENTS UPDATE

37. Councillor Tahir Rafiq, Cabinet Member for Corporate Affairs and HR, presented the report which set out changes to appointments since the Council meeting in May 2023 regarding the new Housing Advisory Board, other appointments and vacancies.
38. Cabinet approved the recommendations as set out in the report.