

Minutes of: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 24 March 2015

Present: Councillor I Gartside (in the Chair);
Councillors D Cassidy; S Carter; A J Cummings; J Daly;
T Holt; M James; E O'Brien; S Nuttall and J Smith

Public in attendance: 2 members of the public were present at the meeting.

Also in attendance: Councillor Southworth– Deputy Cabinet Member Environment

Apologies for absence: Councillor D Bailey and Councillor Tariq

OSC.849 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

OSC.850 MINUTES

It was agreed:

That the Minutes of the meeting, held on 11th February 2015, be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Holt in the list of attendees.

OSC.851 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were asked by members of the public present at the meeting.

OSC.852 PETITION REVIEW

Leigh Webb, Principal Democratic Services Officer, submitted a report setting out details of a request for a review of the way a petition relating to Children's Centres had been dealt with by the Council. The Petition Organiser, Mrs Sian Crosby, addressed the Committee outlining the reasons for requesting the review, which related to the following issues:

- Changes to the petition procedure had taken place during the time between the petition being instigated in August 2014 and being submitted to the Council on 15th December 2014.
- As a result of the above changes, no debate was permitted to take place when the Petition was considered by Council on 28th January 2015
- There was a delay in updating the Council's website when the procedures changed.

- Petition organisers were not clearly notified of the changes to the procedure and the effect these changes would have in terms of how the petition was to be dealt with.

Chris Shillitto, Head of Democratic Services, set out the background to the changes, which were agreed through the Council's Democratic Arrangements Forum on 4 November 2014, with the decision subsequently signed off on 11 December 2014. Members of the Committee had been provided with copies of the relevant papers including the previous and current Petitions Scheme; Minutes of the Democratic Arrangements Forum meeting held on 4 November 2014; Delegated Decision form; and a summary of email correspondence between the Petitioner and Head of Democratic Service.

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

- In response to a question from Councillor Daly, the Head of Democratic Services explained that the Localism Act 2011 had removed the requirement for Council's to have a Petition Scheme. The Democratic Arrangements Forum had reviewed and amended the current scheme on 4 November 2014, largely as a result of issues relating to a petition submitted in September 2014 concerning refuse collection.
- Councillor Nuttall expressed concern that the decision to amend the current scheme was taken at the meeting of the Democratic Arrangements Forum and not put before all Members of Council. Councillor Gartside reported that he was not in attendance at the meeting of the Democratic arrangements Forum on 4 November 2014.
- In response to concerns raised by Councillor Daly in relation to the updating of the Council website, the Head of Democratic Services acknowledged the delay between the decision being signed off on 11 December and the site being updated on 19th December. Councillor Cummings suggested the need for a protocol to ensure the website is updated following any procedural changes.
- Members discussed the possibility of including the Petitions Scheme within the Council Constitution. The Head of Democratic Services confirmed that this would mean any future changes would require the agreement of Full Council.
- The Chair, Councillor Gartside, suggested that the issue of Children's Centres form part of the Committee's Work Programme for 2015/2015 as a means of ensuring the implantation of the agreed changes is closely monitored and scrutinised.

It was agreed:

1. That the Leader of the Council be requested to convene a meeting of the Democratic Arrangements Forum to review the Petitions Scheme in light of the following issues raised by this Committee:

- Consideration be given to including the Petition Scheme within the Council Constitution.
 - Any future changes be promptly notified and explained to organisers of live petitions, with changes not coming into effect until the Council's website is updated.
2. That a report be submitted to the next meeting of this Committee providing an update in respect of the implementation of changes relating to Alternative Services for Under 5's.

OSC.853 CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING OVERVIEW PROJECT GROUP – INTERIM REPORT

Councillor Southworth, Chair of the Children's Safeguarding Overview Project Group, attended the meeting to provide the Committee with an update on the work of the Group. A report was submitted setting out a summary of the work of the Group since its first meeting in November 2014.

As part of the Review, visits had been undertaken to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and to the Advice and Assessment Team. Additionally interviews and evidence gathering had been carried out with a range of senior officers and practitioner. It was reported that at the last meeting of the Group, interviews were undertaken with 3 newly qualified social workers to get their views on the recruitment process and the support measures in place for new recruits

During discussion of this item, Members welcomed the work undertaken by the Group and enquired about the work being done in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Councillor Southworth explained about the Multi Agency work being done through the Bury Phoenix Team and reported that a themed meeting would be held to speak to all relevant partners. In response to concerns raised about CSE and "lifestyle choices", Councillor Southworth reported that she had sought and received assurances that children are seen as nothing but victims.

Councillor Carter suggested the Group look at the role of schools in safeguarding children and the systems in place to report issues.

It was agreed:

1. That the work of the Overview Project Group be carried over into the new Municipal Year 2015/16.
2. That, in order to retain the expertise and knowledge developed throughout the review, where possible the existing membership be retained.
3. That regular updates be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Group.

OSC.854 CORPORATE PLAN PROGRESS REPORT – QUARTER 3 2014-2015

The Leader of the Council submitted a report outlining the progress made on the Corporate Plan during quarter 3 (2014-2015) for the corporate performance indicators and projects within the Bury Council Corporate Plan.

During discussion of this item, Claire Jenkins, Head of Customer Support & Collections, reported that the indicator relating to council tax collected was now green and explained the effect on the indicator from the introduction of a 12 monthly instalment method.

With regard to the Homeless Preventions indicator, Councillor O'Brien sought clarification on whether the figure related to the number of instances or the number of people. Sarah Marshall, Performance Officer, undertook to clarify the definition and report back.

It was agreed:

That the report be noted.

OSC.855 VOTE OF THANKS

Councillor John Smith thanked the Chair, Councillor Gartside, on behalf of the Committee for the fair and impartial manner in which he had chaired the Committee during the current Municipal year.

The Chair, Councillor Gartside, thanked Councillor Smith and Councillor Cummings, who are standing down from the Council, for their hard work and valuable contributions to the work of the Committee.

COUNCILLOR I B GARTSIDE
Chair

(Note: The meeting started at 7pm and ended at 8.35pm)