

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 1 December 2016 at City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.30 pm
Concluded 7.15 pm

Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Cooke M Pollard Rickard	Duffy Green Jamil Watson Warburton	J Sunderland

Observer: Councillor V Slater

Councillor Green in the Chair

56. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

The following disclosures of interest were received in the interest of transparency:

- (i) Councillor Cooke declared an interest in the item relating to Universal Credit (Minute 61) as he was a member of the InCommunitas Board.
- (ii) Councillor Sunderland declared an interest in the item relating to the Property Programme (Minute 60) as she was involved with three community asset transfers in her ward.

ACTION: City Solicitor

57. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meetings held on 19 October and 3 November 2016 be signed as a correct record.



58. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

59. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals made to the Committee.

ACTION: *No Action*

60. PROPERTY PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

The Director of Finance submitted a report (**Document “Y”**) which set out the overall progress made by the Property Programme (formerly b-works) to date and on the 2016/17 projects. The report also highlighted the future direction of the Programme.

The Estates Manager gave a detailed overview of the Programme, during which the following aspects were highlighted:

- That the Property Programme was a ten year ‘invest to save’ strategy, to deliver a well managed and fit for purpose estate.
- The Programme was in year 9 of a 10 year resourced programme.

By the end of 2016/17 it is projected that the Programme will have delivered:

- £7.3m of on-going per year gross revenue savings from vacating over 69 properties. The savings from the start of the Programme to the end of 2016/17 total £27.2m and will be equivalent to £42m by the end of the Programme in 2018/19.
- Vacating the buildings will have reduced operational floor space occupied by approximately 83,000m² (25%), equivalent to in excess of 8 Jacobs Wells, with a further 14,000m² in the pipeline.
- Additionally approximately 50 Community Asset Transfers applications were currently in the process of being assessed.
- That £39m of capital receipts from disposing of surplus properties. An additional benefit to the district is that many of the surplus properties are subsequently redeveloped by the purchasers thus aiding regeneration.
- That over £50 million of backlog maintenance reductions from investing in retained premises and disposing of surplus properties.
- That the Programme had delivered the infrastructure necessary to enable flexible and mobile working.
- To deliver the above benefits the Programme will have incurred approximately £15.4m of revenue expenditure and £52m of capital expenditure from the start of the Programme in 2008/9 to the end of 2016/17.
- The Programme had recently completed work on a scheme to refurbish



Argus Chambers and part of Britannia House.

Projects approved in 2016/17 included:

- A £2m Essential Maintenance programme.
- £0.2m Shipley Library refurbishment and creation of a Community Hub.
- £750k for the refurbishment of the 5 upper floors of Argus Chambers.
- £2m for the refurbishment of the ground floor space and reconfigured upper floor space in Britannia House.
- The relocation of staff from Jacobs Well to Argus Chambers/Britannia House.
- Depot Strategy – £3m scheme to create a new depot facility. This scheme will enable the vacation of Shearbridge Depot, Harris Street Depot and the Tramshed, Wakefield Road.

During the discussion Members asked a number questions, the questions together with the responses are set out below:

A Member stated that Community Asset Transfers (CAT) were becoming more pertinent recently, and that it was difficult for people to know how to commence the CAT process. He ascertained what help was available to enable individuals and community groups to navigate through the process, negotiate with the Council, as many people lacked the capacity and confidence to do this. In response the Estates Manager explained that the whole CAT process can be accessed online, which takes you through the criteria and process. In addition if individuals or organisations contacted the department, the department was happy to support people through the process. Advice was also given on how to develop a business case and where to seek advice, together with information on funding streams that may be available.

The Assistant Director commented that the volume of CAT requests was high and currently the service was dealing with 51 applications, sometimes involving multiple assets.

A Member stated that he had concerns that people may not be given enough time when going through a CAT process, and that in some cases it may be the only community building in the area, and the reality of taking on an old building may be a huge undertaking, and therefore it was important that support was given to communities. In response the Estates Manager stressed that the Council was encouraging people to come forward and 'have a go', however in many cases the business case that was submitted required further work.

A Member stated that he was concerned that some groups had been advised that they either go through the CAT process, otherwise the building would close, and they had not been given any information or advice beyond that.

A Member endorsed the above comments, and stated that he was not convinced that groups were being advised about the options open to them, and it was important that there were clear lines of communications and clear advice given to



interested parties. The Assistant Director assured Members that the service will ensure that the information and advice given was consistent.

A Member stated she had been involved in a number of Community Asset Transfers, and although it was a good idea, there was the potential for it to go skew-whiff, particularly as there was very little funding available, particularly in relation to National Lottery funding. In addition it was difficult for community groups to borrow money and it maybe worth exploring the setting up of loan system to assist and encourage community groups in coming forward.

In relation to a question regarding backlog maintenance it was stated that buildings were assessed in terms of their operational viability and whether or not they should be disposed.

The Chair ascertained what the acceptable level of backlog maintenance was against the value of the estate and how the rolling maintenance programme was conducted. In response it was pointed out that property surveys were undertaken on a 5 year rolling programme, and in the context of the property programme, the Council now had a better understanding of the condition of its estate than ever before.

In relation to a question regarding tax liability on the estate, it was suggested that a report detailing information about the Council's Investment Portfolio could be presented to this Committee.

In response to a question regarding the longer term objectives of the Property Programme and how it related to the Council's overall objectives, it was pointed out that as the Council continued to rationalise its estate, the property portfolio could be used to generate income streams, or used in advancing employment opportunities or for housing purposes.

The Estates Manager stated that there were still a number of capital projects to complete and that a new programme will be developed in due course, of which the details will also be reported to this Committee.

Resolved –

- (1) That this Committee requests that a report detailing information about the Council's investment portfolio and policy be presented to this Committee in March 2107.**
- (2) That the next report in 12 months time, also includes details of the forward strategy for the property programme.**

ACTION: Assistant Director Estates & Property



61. UNIVERSAL CREDIT

The Director of Finance submitted a report (**Document “Z”**) which set out progress in rolling out Universal Credit, both locally and nationally, and the support arrangements that had been introduced to support residents claiming Universal Credit.

The Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits and Payroll explained that Universal Credit was introduced in the Bradford District in November 2015, and had, so far, been restricted to single newly unemployed people. The Council has recently learned that couples and families will start to apply for the new benefit from March 2018.

The Department for Work and Pensions had put a number of support arrangements in place, such as coaching and training better tailored to the claimants' circumstances. However, the Government had recognised that Local Authorities were best placed to provide this support locally. Locally provided support, by both the Council and DWP, was outlined in Appendix 1 to Document “Z”.

To formalise the working relationship between the DWP and the Council a framework agreement, known as Universal Support - delivered locally (USDL), had been established. This included the Delivery Partnership Agreement, which sets out how UC support arrangements will be delivered at the local level; including the establishment of a 'Local Delivery Partnership' to deliver specific support services to claimants.

The scope of the USDL agreement was set out in Appendix 2 to Document “Z”. The current agreement ends on 31 March 2017; a new agreement will be negotiated for 2017/18, informed by the lessons learnt to date.

During the discussion Members asked a number of questions which are detailed below with the responses.

In relation to a question on the full extent on the number of people claiming UC, it was explained that currently 55,000 families claimed tax credits, of this how many were in receipt of UC or housing benefit was difficult to extrapolate.

In response to a question regarding pensioners it was pointed out that although pensioners were outside of the scope of UC, currently 20,000 pensioners received Council Tax support and just a slightly lesser number were in receipt of housing benefit.

A Member stated that as a result of housing benefit changes being paid directly to the claimant, rent collection rates may fall as a consequence and this may have a corresponding impact on the budgeting support that would be offered as part of Universal Credit. In response the Assistant Director acknowledged that there were a number of issues he could foresee, including the fact that Universal Credit was paid in arrears, this could lead to claimants being in arrears with their rent and it may be difficult in future to determine who was genuinely in arrears.



A Member stressed that the need to monitor those individuals most at risk. The Assistant Director stated that in relation to risk, people can move in and out of risk, depending on their circumstances, however the transitional nature of Universal Credit would allow people to make this transition and enable any problems to be identified at an early stage. The Assistant Director also stressed that fewer people would be affected by the impact of Universal Credit, than the more profound impact resulting from the wider welfare reform changes.

A Member highlighted that vulnerable groups could be more at risk given the delays being experienced in relation to the commissioning of advice services.

In relation to the cap being placed on the amount of housing benefit an individual can claim, the Assistant Director confirmed that the relevant service was trying to engage with private landlords on the impact the changes will have on their tenants. On a related point a Member stated that the changes could lead to more private landlords refusing to house tenants in receipt of housing benefit, which in turn could place pressure on the social housing sector.

It was suggested that Members should be provided with further details on Universal Credit, together with information on the broader welfare changes, and it was therefore:

Resolved –

- (1) That a briefing note be circulated to Members of this Committee on Universal Credit, which includes its likely impacts and the number of people in the district that will be affected.**
- (2) That a briefing note on the broader welfare changes also be circulated to all Members of Council.**

ACTION: Assistant Director Revenues, Benefits and Payroll

62. CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

The Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (**Document “AA”**) which set out the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2016/17.

During the discussion it was suggested that as well as advising the Overview and Scrutiny Lead of changes to the work programme, that future meetings should not have more than 3 substantive agenda items to avoid meetings going beyond a 3 hour duration.



Resolved –

That the work programme 2016-17 continues to be reviewed regularly and following the discussions it was agreed that members would inform the Overview and Scrutiny Lead of any changes to the work programme, where some topics could be considered informally through briefing notes being circulated to members.

ACTION: Overview and Scrutiny Lead

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER



**City of Bradford
Metropolitan District Council**

