

# Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 15 November 2018 in Committee Room 1 - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.30 pm  
Concluded 8.30 pm

## Present – Councillors

CONSERVATIVE	LABOUR	LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
Cooke Hargreaves M Pollard	Duffy Bacon Green Watson	J Sunderland

## Councillor Duffy in the Chair

Observers: Councillor Hinchcliffe (Leader of Council) and Councillor Ross-Shaw (portfolio holder)

## 26. MINUTES SILENCE

At the commencement of the meeting, a minutes silence was observed as a mark of respect for Councillor Ian Greenwood OBE who had very recently passed away.

## 27. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interests of clarity, Councillor Bacon disclosed an interest in respect of the item regarding the Anti-Poverty Co-ordination Group (minute 33) as the Council's anti-poverty champion and Councillor Cooke disclosed an interest in the item regarding Business Rate Collection (minute 38) as a trustee of Cullingworth Sports Association.

**Action: City Solicitor**

## 28. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2018 be signed as a correct record.

## 29. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS



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

### **30. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

On 16 October 2018 the following referral had been made to the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee by Council

#### *PERIOD POVERTY*

*Resolved –*

*This Council notes:*

- Because of Government cuts more than one in four children in the UK are living in poverty (27.1% in 2015-16) and this will rise to almost one in three (31.3%) by 2021-22, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies.*
- Food bank use has risen rapidly in recent years with the Trussell Trust reporting it gave out a record 1.3m food parcels to an estimated 666,000 people in 2017-18, up 13% on the previous year.*
- People who are unable to afford food might also be unable to afford other essentials such as sanitary products. Young girls may be particularly vulnerable to the impact as it could lead to them missing school or having to choose between buying food or sanitary protection.*
- After being tasked by the Leader to explore how we can address this issue, officers launched a pilot scheme at Britannia House in May this year to take donations of products to be provided through the Storehouse, a local charity that supplies over 30 food banks.*

*This Council will:*

- Carry out more detailed research to identify the causes and extent of the issue, what good practice is already taking place and what more can be done to address the problem most effectively across the district.*
- Work with partners such as the Clinical Commissioning Group, schools, the Red Box project and the Storehouse to establish the best ways to tackle the problem.*
- Ask officers to report back to the Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee before the end of December with their findings and options for scaling up our activity with partners.*
- Call on Government to remove VAT from all sanitary products.*

On 25 October 2018, that Committee had made the following referral to this Committee:

That, following consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and in the view of the fact that the issue is related to poverty rather than health or social care, that the recommendation of Council be referred to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.



With the agreement of the meeting, the Chair announced that the matter would be included in the work programme for this Committee.

***Action: Overview and Scrutiny Lead***

**31. QUARTER 2 FINANCE POSITION STATEMENT FOR 2018-19**

The Director of Finance presented a report (**Document “L”**) which provided Members with an overview of the forecast financial position of the Council for 2018-19. The report examined the latest spend against revenue and capital budgets and forecast the financial position at the year end. It stated the Council’s current balances and reserves and forecast school balances for the year.

Members were advised that, although the projected level of overspend for the Council was higher than had previously been forecast, since the first quarter position statement had been provided, a great deal of work had gone into mitigating actions and understanding the causes of financial pressure.

Members questioned the presenting officers in some detail in respect of the report, commencing with questions about school reserves and the challenge process around them and the on-going situation in respect of the financial deficit at Hanson School. They were advised that a robust reserve review process had been instituted this year and that reserves which were no longer required would be reallocated. They were also advised that the Council continued to work with the Trust and governors at Hanson School to manage the on-going situation.

A Member commented that he considered that the description of mitigation measures in respect of health and well-being seemed a little vague and considered that it would be helpful to have more substance to this part of the report so that Members could quantify whether the measures would make a difference. As the reporting process was new and evolving, officers undertook to take his comments on board. The Assistant Director, Health and Wellbeing was in attendance and explained that housing schemes referred to in the report were intended for a small number of people with very complex needs and would enable those people to leave hospital and live more independently.

A Member noted that an overspend was forecast on social work services within Children’s Services in spite of planned recruitment and queried why that was. He was informed that, even though recent recruitment events had proven very successful, agency staff could not be released until new recruits were up to speed, which would then result in the forecast overspend. In response to another query from the same member, the Assistant Director, Social Care advised that the forecast underspend in Education and Learning was the result of savings being made ahead of schedule.

A Member then enquired whether recent social worker resignations had been from among more experienced staff members and was advised that they were staff members who had completed their assessed year. New recruits were less experienced although some were former agency workers who had chosen to join the Council permanently and some were staff who had previously left but had returned. Social workers with experience other than in children’s services had been targeted during recruitment. The Assistant Director confirmed that real progress had been made with staff numbers.

A Member went on to request that a detailed report on the financing of children’s services be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.

A Member asked about the issue of assistance with travel to school in relation to those



parents who also received funding from other sources for the same purpose. Officers undertook to provide a response to the question after the meeting. The Member also queried the issue of street lighting and whether spending to save was an option. She was advised that a business case was currently being put together, based on investment in LED lighting and that a report on the issue would be presented to the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the new year. Members were advised that any thoughts on the issue of street lighting should be forwarded to the Overview and Scrutiny Lead who would pass them on to the officers concerned.

Another Member picked up the issue of assistance with travel and whether the aim of increasing personal independence as well as resolving issues such as those already raised by his colleague was realistic. He was advised that it was an extremely challenging area to review and improve as the policy needed to be applied evenly across all applicants, including people already in the system who might have different expectations than new applicants.

A Member requested an update on the number of foster carers across the Authority and was advised that 72 new carers had been recruited in the last year but that there had also been some retirees. It was noted that the number of children in in-house care had increased slightly and that the increase in external placements was the result of children coming into the care system overall. It was stressed that foster caring was under significant pressure nationally.

A Member queried the proposed city centre market development, expressing his concern about the cost of the project and asking when a cost benefit analysis would be undertaken. He was advised that the cost benefit analysis had been done as part of the capital investment process and that it showed a break even situation as there was significant income from the markets. There was also non-quantifiable gain in terms of regeneration to the area.

As a result of the concerns expressed by the Member, a colleague Member suggested that a future report be presented explaining the decision making process in respect of all major capital projects. The Committee concurred with that view.

A Member concluded the questioning by noting that the report referred to 980 vacant posts across the Council currently and asked by what point there would be clarity in respect of those posts. The officer undertook to provide a response in writing after the meeting.

#### **Resolved –**

- (1) That this Committee requests a future report on the financing of Children's Social Care.**
- (2) That this Committee requests a future report describing the decision making process in relation to major capital projects, including the cost benefit analysis process.**

***ACTION: Director of Finance***

## **32. HALF YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Committee was asked to consider **Document "M"** which provided a summary of progress in the first half of the year against the Council's key performance indicators. Members were advised that the report was in a slightly different format in order to provide



greater clarity. They considered that the current format was an improvement in terms of presentation.

A Member questioned the Head of Policy and Performance in respect of the Council's relationship with other organisations, particularly the Police, and how that influenced outcomes for Bradford. He was advised that the Police and Crime Commissioner had been invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss such matters. The Strategic Director, Place concurred that it was important to work in partnership with other organisations, including local businesses and WYCA to take best advantage of the opportunities that were specific to Bradford, such as a having young and growing population; having some of the most productive businesses in the north and having a distinctiveness of place. He also stressed that community safety was a responsibility for everyone and that he felt sure that the Police and Crime Commissioner would be reporting that recording of crime was increasing when he came to Committee.

In response to a question about targets, Members were advised that although targets were set until 2030, they were monitored annually and that a report with the latest data would be presented to a future meeting.

A Member commented that the implication in the report that the number of looked after children was at a reasonable level was not necessarily accurate, given that more children may need such care. He was advised that there was no concern from OFSTED about that measure.

A Member queried the survey used as an indicator for "Better Skills, More Good Jobs and a Growing Economy" and was informed that it was a nationally recognised measure, using a representative group of people.

A question was also asked about the average number of sick days recorded and whether the recording process was improving rather than the incidence of sickness was reducing. In response, Members were advised that an in-depth review of this topic was due to take place shortly and that more health and well being events were planned to support staff better.

The number of looked after children was queried as the report contained two different sets of information. Members were advised that the figure currently stood at 1029, which was a reduction from 1050 in June of this year.

Following a question about outcomes from schools, especially in relation to the Born in Bradford generation, the Deputy Director Social Care undertook to provide a written response.

**Resolved –**

**That Document "M" be noted.**

**No Action**

### **33. ANTI POVERTY CO-ORDINATION GROUP**

Previous Reference: Minute 67 (2017/18)

The Strategic Director Place presented a report (**Document "Q"**) which contained a draft of the Bradford District Anti-Poverty Co-ordination Group's approach for tackling poverty along with data measures that would be used to evidence the impact of activity at District



level and, where available, at ward level.

The Member who was also the Council's Anti-Poverty Champion commended the report, stressing the importance of networking and highlighting the recent large families poverty event as a particularly successful and moving event. She also advised that an event including free crafting activities was planned as an alternative to the commercialism and pressure of "Black Friday". She stressed how proud she was of the work of the Anti Poverty Co-ordination Group.

A Member challenged the view that leaving school with no qualifications was a barrier to success, citing his own experience as an example of success in those circumstances. Officers supported that view, stating that there were many routes to success and that while there was a clear correlation between skills and employment, skills did not always mean formal qualifications. They went on to stress that a young person's first job was often crucial and that this was the reason behind a joint project on supported recruitment which was currently on-going with the NHS.

A Member expressed some concern about the language used in the report, stating that he would prefer to see a more "nuts and bolts" explanation of service delivery.

Members concurred that, while the amount of work being done across the District to support people experiencing poverty was a credit to all those involved, it would be useful to have a more rigorous report in future in terms of examining statistics and questioning whether some of the priorities listed in the appendix to the report might be duplication of work already done elsewhere. An external partner of the Anti-Poverty Co-ordination Group explained that the list in the appendix of what was currently happening was everything that was taking place in the District under other strategies which linked to the anti-poverty strategy. The strategy's actions focussed only on the gaps to prevent duplication. The strategy was not yet adopted and implementation would follow shortly so it was too early yet to report on delivery.

A Member explained her own experience of working with families experiencing poverty, especially supporting young people who struggled during schools holidays. She strongly advocated keeping school premises open longer and supporting youth centre and community groups to be as open and accessible as possible.

The Policy Officer involved with the Group explained to the Committee that the Group was very new and would need to understand much more about this topic before it recommended actions which may not be helpful. She advised that the actions currently set out in the appendix to the report were ones that all partners were happy to sign up to at this point.

**Resolved –**

- (1) That the final draft Bradford District Anti Poverty Co-ordination Group's Approach for Tackling Poverty 2018-2020 be accepted and endorsed.**
- (2) That the draft Anti Poverty Strategy be presented to the Executive for approval taking into consideration the comments raised by this Committee.**
- (3) That a progress report in relation to the work of the Bradford District Anti Poverty Co-ordination Group and progress against the delivery plan be presented to this Committee in 12 months time.**

***ACTION: Strategic Director, Place***





#### 34. **UPDATE ON FAMILIES FIRST PROGRAMME INCLUDING LINKS TO STRONGER FAMILIES**

Previous Reference: Minute 38 (2017/18)

**Document “P”** was a report of the Strategic Director, Children’s Services which provided an update on the Families First Programme since the Committee had last considered it in November 2017.

The report covered national programme development, local progress and service changes made since the last report. It also provided examples of how the programme had helped local families turn around their lives.

Members commended the Deputy Director Social Care on the report and on the much improved situation in respect of troubled families.

In response to question about reaching out to those families who most negatively impacted in their communities, Members were advised that there was a good mechanic for reaching such families and that outreach work was very assertive but were reminded that the programme was voluntary so families did need to consent to be involved. Representatives from different agencies involved in the programme were present at the meeting and explained their own organisation’s part in supporting troubled families.

Members questioned the officers about key worker support and the number of families who had been helped and were advised that the voluntary sector had 24 key workers across the District and that the Council had 14 key workers, 56 frontline workers and seven prevention workers. The average caseload per worker was 10-12 families over a six month period, which meant in the region of 50 individual clients. 3809 families had been involved to date.

The Chair queried what the situation would be after 2020 when the programme was due to end and was informed that, while there was no plan in place at present, the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government had undertaken a monitoring visit recently and had been extremely complementary about the model. There was also an additional funding stream to utilise in respect of children at risk of criminal exploitation.

The Chair also asked about returnees to the programme and was assured that, while this would always be the case, it was a minimal number and there was now a reduction in terms of children being referred to child protection.

**Resolved –**

**That the implementation of Bradford’s Families First and Stronger Families Programmes which deliver effective services to families, avoid duplication and improve outcomes for families in the District be noted.**

**No Action**

#### 35. **FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT FOR CONSTRUCTION RELATED PROFESSIONAL SERVICES**

Members were aware that Paragraph 4.7 of the Council’s Contracts Standing Orders required that for contracts with a total estimated value in excess of £2m details must be reported to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



Accordingly, the report of the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources (**Document “N”**) was provided for information to advise Members of the forthcoming procurement of a contract with a value in excess of £2m for an initial three year period with an optional one year extension.

Members were advised that Built Environment wished to procure, via an open EU compliant procurement process, a framework agreement for the provision of consultancy services for Construction, Design and Management Services.

The current framework expired on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2019 and procurement of a replacement framework was required to ensure compliance with Procurement Legislation and Contract Standing Orders.

A Member expressed concern that the presentation of options in the report was not open and transparent as it did not show that most of the advantages relating to option one would also relate to option two. Officers took that point on board but highlighted that having a local framework meant that relationships could be built with Bradford firms which were not well represented on the regional framework. Members suggested that the optimum solution to that issue would be to support more local firms onto the regional framework to maximise the opportunity to get value for money for Bradford.

A Member also considered that option one described in the report would promote local labour and training for local people.

**Resolved –**

**That a future report be presented outlining the value to Bradford residents arising from monies spent on such contracts.**

***ACTION: Strategic Director, Corporate Resources***

**36. PROCUREMENT OF A GENERAL CONTRACTORS FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT**

Members were aware that Paragraph 4.7 of the Council's Contracts Standing Orders required that for contracts with a total estimated value in excess of £2m details must be reported to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The report of the Strategic Director, Corporate Resources (**Document “O”**) was provided for information to advise Members of the forthcoming procurement of a framework agreement with a value in excess of £2million, for an initial period of three years with an optional one year extension.

Members were advised that the Council's Built Environment Team currently utilised a framework contract for building works in live education environments which was used to procure contractors to deliver new builds, alterations and expansion works in primary schools, secondary schools and early years provisions.

The current framework had been in place since 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015 and was due to expire on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019. Procurement of a replacement framework was required to ensure maintenance of supply, compliance with EU procurement legislation and Contract Standing Orders.

Members noted that this item was closely related to the previous item and, therefore:





**Resolved –**

**That a future report be presented outlining the value to Bradford residents arising from monies spent on such contracts.**

**Action: Strategic Director, Corporate Services**

### **37. COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION**

The Committee was asked to consider **Document “R”** which was a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate Services setting out the Council’s performance in, and the challenge for, the collection of Council Tax.

The Assistant Director, Revenues and Benefits attended the meeting and explained the on-going challenges of Council Tax collection, including the issue of transience among Bradford residents. He also highlighted that collection was currently running at a higher rate than the budget was predicated on. In terms of improvement, there was a collection protocol with the Citizens Advice Bureau and a peer review by Wakefield Council was currently on-going.

A Member commented that other Local Authorities also dealt with issues such as transience and absentee landlords and suggested looking into that issue too.

Members queried the issues of houses of multiple occupation and liability for those properties and writing off debt and were advised that a lot of apartment blocks were self contained units so landlords were not responsible and that arrears of debt were pursued vigorously but did sometimes result in the challenge of collecting multi-year debt.

In response to further questions, the Assistant Director advised that further work needed to be done on the issue of corporate ownership and that it was not possible to require landlords to take responsibility for council tax from their tenants as the tenant’s own circumstances affected the level of tax payable. He also undertook to look into the issue of court costs levied in respect of debts which were subsequently paid off.

A Member queried whether anything could be done about empty properties and was advised that, if the property was registered with Land Registry, steps could be taken to recover costs when it was sold.

**Resolved –**

**(1) That this Committee notes progress in the collection of Council Tax.**

**(2) That a progress report be presented in twelve months time.**

**ACTION : Strategic Director, Corporate Services**

### **38. BUSINESS RATE COLLECTION**

The Strategic Director, Corporate Resources presented a report (**Document “S”**) which set out the Council’s performance in, and the challenges for, the collection of Business Rates.

The Assistant Director, Revenues and Benefits attended the meeting and highlighted key



areas within the report, including that this was a new report for the Committee to consider and that, while collection rates were better than those for Council Tax, they were still not as high as he would wish. He advised that the level of arrears overall was low but that a small number of issues could affect the collection percentage significantly.

In response to a question, he advised that the recent Government budget announcement would benefit local retail businesses to the tune of £4million but would not affect the Council as a result of the Government grant which was currently payable.

The Leader of Council, who was in attendance as an observer, stated that a fair funding review was currently underway and that, as business rates were set by the Government the Council could do nothing to influence or change them. Her concern was that an additional burden could be placed on Councils and stressed that this must be kept under review.

**Resolved –**

**(1) That this Committee notes progress in the collection of Business Rates.**

**(2) That a progress report be presented in twelve months time.**

***ACTION: Strategic Director, Corporate Resources***

**39. WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

The Chair of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report (**Document “T”**) which set out the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for 2018/19.

Members were advised to pass their comments on the work programme to the Overview and Scrutiny Lead.

No resolution was passed in respect of this item.

***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.**

THIS AGENDA AND ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER

